



# 100 poems

DoYū Risa Bear

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These poems appear online as blog posts at  
<http://onehundredpoets.blogspot.com/>

*Ogura Hyakunin Isshu (One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each)* is an anthology of one hundred tanka (31-syllable poems) compiled by Fujiwara no Teika in the year 1235 C.E. It is one of the best-known works in Japan, and has been translated into English many times. The present collection consists of original poem/commentaries written over the course of several days to explore my feelings in response to the Japanese poems. The model for this is the incomplete series of prints by Hokusai, "One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each As Explained by the Old Nurse," in which the artist explores the poems not so much in relation to their original setting as in relation to the artist's personal sense of universal experience.

The poetic method in this response is not syllable counting as in the original tanka, but achieves a similar compression in a manner appropriate to English through the use of mostly two-stressed lines, except where one stress carries the thought. The arrangement into, mostly, tercets (three-line stanzas) is purely arbitrary. Yes, the poems are somewhat autobiographical; but of this I will say no more; every human heart holds secrets.

To set these poems by an Oregonian together with those to which they respond, I have provided the Japanese poems with (sometimes updated versions of) MacCauley's translation (1917), as well as Hokusai's prints if available.

By the same author

*Collected Poems*

*Homecomings*

*Iron Buddhas*

*Starvation Ridge*

*Toward a Buddhist/Permaculture Ethic*

*Viewing Jasper Mountain*

*What To Do About Trees*

## One

Sleeves dripping  
from my hike  
through heavy

autumnal rains,  
I find shelter  
amid tall books:

drying my hands,  
I find one, lifting it  
down with care from

that high shelf:  
prints, depicting  
with love, hard

country lives —  
sudden tears.

*Taking refuge in the Art Library one day in 1999, with rain bucketing down on the quad, Risa moved to the Oversize section and lifted down a heavy volume of prints by Hokusai. It was her first introduction to the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu. The phrase "as explained by the old nurse" in Hokusai's title for his print series surprised her by moving her to tears.*

*She was living alone at the time, indulging herself in a "midlife crisis." After the rains ceased, she went home to her small room near campus and wrote one hundred small poems over the course of the next ten days.*



てんじてんのう

あきのたの  
かりほのいおの  
とまをあらみ

わがころもでは  
つゆにぬれつつ

*(Emperor) Tenchi Tenno*

Coarse the rush-mat roof  
Sheltering the harvest-hut  
Of the autumn rice-field —

And my sleeves are growing wet  
With the moisture dripping through.

*The emperor had stepped out into the fields on a rainy day and taken refuge in a rude hut of the kind constructed by field hands to get in out of the weather from time to time. He feels connection with their lives and finds water on his sleeves — a metaphor for weeping.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse shows busy farmers in the rice field. It is not raining, and the harvest hut is empty. Perhaps the Emperor has not yet arrived. Or perhaps it is Hokusai's own time, and the emperor came here hundreds of years before, and is long dead and forgotten by the rice farmers ...*

## Two

She moves in spring  
as one who  
has carried herself

all winter among  
famous people.  
Yet she does

her own housework;  
knows, as her  
ancestors knew,

to spread white wash  
over rhododendrons  
in bright sun, like

remnants of snow —  
glimpses, which some  
have seen, of

the mountain,  
robed in ice.

*Risa is thinking of a time she washed and hung out her laundry when snow was still on the mountains, and observed the white of the household sheets against the white of the skyline. No one else was around, and she was stirred with melancholy that the moment could not be shared.*

じとうてんのう

はるすぎて  
なつきにけらし  
しろたえの

ころもほすちょう  
あまのかぐやま

2

*(Empress) Jito Tenno*

Spring, it seems, has passed,  
And the summer come again;  
For the silk-white robes,

So 'tis said, are spread to dry  
On the "Mount of Heaven's Perfume."

*There is said to be a hint here that the robes need to be washed and aired out because of discreet encounters over the course of the winter, a regular feature of life at Court. The empress may or may not have seen, in the year in which she is writing, the robes drying on Kaguyama. This might obliquely express a regret that, as Empress, she has fewer options in some ways than her ladies. Or she may simply be thinking of the beauty of spring tasks, in contrast to the enclosed life of winter.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse sees fabric being brought to the sea by laundry workers for washing, and carried by them from the sea for drying on the racks in the background. Perhaps that is Kaguyama on the horizon.*

### Three

I took a room  
and called it  
Susuki-Grass Room

to honor Narihira.  
Tonight, however,  
I think of

Hitomaro, who slept  
alone. Streets  
below grow quiet.

in dream I climb,  
checking  
wayside benches —

I call, but your answer  
is a single  
pheasant feather

by the moonlit trail.

*Risa speaks of the room where she lived alone, thinking of one who was absent. She is responding to Hitomaro but also thinking of a poem by Narihira (a different one than is included in this collection). He, too, thought of an absent love, and was suddenly struck in the middle of the night by a fear that she had died. Susuki-grass surrounded the room in which Narihira's loneliness overcame him. The wayside benches are placed along a trail on a mountain where Risa had sometimes walked with her love. Pheasants are sometimes seen there.*

かきのもとのひとまろ

あしびきの  
やまどりのおの  
しだりおの

ながながしよお  
ひとりかもねん

3

*Kakinomoto no Hitomaro*

Ah! the foot-drawn trail  
Of the mountain-pheasant's tail  
Drooped like down-curved branch—

Through this long, long-dragging night  
Must I keep my couch alone?

*Hitomaro was a court poet active around 700 C.E. , noted for expressing longing during absences of the beloved.*



*Fishermen net a stream in cold weather. Hokusai's Old Nurse refers only obliquely to the poem, through imagery that evokes "drag" and "long."*



## Four

Remember climbing to  
the lakes basin?  
How, rounding

that last bend, we  
were hammered down  
by the glory of

summer snow —  
Even the gray jays  
alighting on our knees

to seek crumbs  
could not long bend  
our eyes away.

*Here, Risa is remembering a hike with a beloved to a place high in the wilderness. They were there several days, mostly sitting and watching the clouds' shadows drift across the face of the area's highest mountain.*

かきのもとのひとまろ

あしびきの  
やまどりのおの  
しだりおの

ながながしよお  
ひとりかもねん

4

*Yamabe no Akahito*

When to Tago's coast  
I the way have gone, and seen  
Perfect whiteness laid

On Mount Fuji's lofty peak  
By the drift of falling snow.

*Yamabe no Akahito was one of Japan's "Poetry Immortals," active around 725 C.E. . He was a member of the Emperor's court and wrote of his observations of scenes on their travels.*



*The Old Nurse does visualize the likely viewpoint from which Akihito took his view. But she focuses on the toil of the laborers in the emperor's train, bringing along the voluminous belongings of those in Akihito's class.*

## Five

I walk along  
the ridge crest  
with nothing in my hands.

Where are you now?  
and how is it  
I am alive here —

as snow begins  
to fall?

*Risa laments the death of someone — who had thoroughly captured her heart — from brain cancer at the age of forty-two. They had gone to lunch together only a month before the end. The friend had concealed the condition, and focused on other topics. Some years later, as Risa's health was mysteriously deteriorating, the doctor suddenly asked — are you carrying a hidden grief? Risa burst into tears.*

さるまるだゆう

おくやまに  
もみじふみわけ  
なくしかの

こえきくときぞ  
あきはかなしき

5

*Sarumaru Dayu*

In the mountain depths,  
Treading through the crimson leaves,  
Cries the wandering stag.

When I hear the lonely cry,  
Sad — how sad — the autumn is!

*Sarumayu Dayu, dating from around 700 C.E., is almost unknown other than through poems, and is one of the Thirty-Six Immortals. This poem seems to parallel a buck's loss of a beloved doe with the poet's loss of a beloved through death. It rings true.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse, on the other hand shows a buck and doe together on a distant hill at sunset, as women return home from work with rakes and pack baskets. One of the women turns and points out the two to a companion.*

## Six

Under stars  
diamond hard,  
I cross this log bridge

where we fed birds  
by the lake,  
skating my boots

like a young girl,  
hoping to find you,  
this time, cabined,

building fire  
on the open hearth.

*In Risa's poem she is remembering a fragmented and anxious dream of love, involving an icy bridge. Perhaps she should say no more.*

ちゅうなごんやかもち

かささぎの  
わたせるはしに  
おくしもの

しろきをみれば  
よぞふけにける

6

*Chunagon Yakamochi*

If Magpie Bridge  
By flight of magpies spanned,  
White with frost I find,

With deep-laid frost made white:  
Late, I see, has grown the night.

*Chunagon Yakamochi was one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals and active about 750 C.E. . This is a complex poem; there was a bridge in the Imperial Palace called the Magpie Bridge, but the reference to a flight of magpies evokes the Chinese legend of the maiden and her lover, stars separated by the Milky Way (thought of here as a river). Magpies build for her a bridge on the seventh day of the seventh month to go and see him, once a year.*





*Hokusai's old woman's response is suitably oblique; passengers on a Chinese boat point to passing magpies.*

## Seven

Moonrise, and I  
am here.  
And where you are —  
  
moonrise.

*Risa responds here with a haiku, echoing Nakamaro's evocative tanka. Her beloved, at the time she is remembering, was three thousand miles away, so it is a bit of literary license.*

あべのなかまろ

あまのはら  
ふりさけみれば  
かすがる

みかさやまに  
いでしつきかも

7

*Abe no Nakamaro*

When I look abroad  
Over the wide-stretched "Plain of Heaven,"  
Is the moon the same

That on Mount Mikasa rose,  
In the land of Kasuga?

*Abe no Nakamaro, active circa 750 C.E., was an administrator who worked in China; perhaps here he is simply homesick for Japan.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse's depiction of Nakamaro is straightforward — of course Japan is in the direction he is facing as the moon rises, shown indirectly as a reflection in the sea. The wind is coming from the east — unusual, as, when night falls, the sea breeze usually is replaced by a land breeze. This may represent the strength of Nakamaro's feelings as he stands, lost in thought, while his attendants await his pleasure unheeded.*

## Eight

I lived two years  
in mountain mist.  
No one came to visit

the abandoned quarry.  
I fished every day,  
and short summer's

sun seemed brighter  
than ever it did  
in town.

*Risa once worked as a member of a forestry cooperative, and lived in a tiny house built on the back of an old flatbed truck. Most of the work was in the winters, and she spent two summers parked in an abandoned quarry in Oregon's Coast Range. Her income would not have permitted a permanent address such as an apartment or even a rooming house. A stream at the foot of the quarry road provided trout, and foraged greens, along with a sack of potatoes, formed the rest of her diet. Sunrises, sunsets, and good books were her companions. Some might have thought her unhappy there — she would have disagreed.*

きせんほうし

わがいおは  
みやこのたつみ  
しかぞすむ

よをうちやまと  
ひとはいうなり

8

*Kisen Hoshi (monk)*

A lowly hut have I,  
Southeast from the capital,  
Where I have chosen to dwell –

And the world in which I live  
Men have named "Mount of Gloom."

*Not much is known about Kisen Hoshi, active in the 800s. He was a monk whose hermitage was on a mountain near Kyoto known as Mount Sorrow or Mount Gloom. There is now a Buddhist temple on the site.*



*The word for "gloom" is similar to that for "deer," which might be why Hokusai shows hunters about to shoot deer in his illustration — which otherwise seems to have little connection to the poem. Most of the action is in the foreground. A palanquin bearer has noticed the hunters. Meanwhile, a farmer has turned to greet a traveler, who is perhaps the monk en route to the mountain, or Hokusai on his inward journey, or both.*

## Nine

Did she remember  
Narihira's sad dream  
that she had died?

— when she journeyed  
across the land,  
years after he himself

was grass? — and  
have not we  
done as he,

lying awake hour  
after passing hour,  
filled with dread

for love?

*Risa's poem again refers to Narihira's panicked dream that Ono no Komachi, whom he loved, had died. Though Ono in her old age steadfastly eschewed talk of love, here Risa identifies with Narihira, one of Komachi's many lovers, whose touching irrationality Risa finds emblematic of the human condition. There is a time to be old and Empty and ready to depart — but before that there may be a time for glorious foolishness.*



おののこまち

はなのいろは  
うつりにけりな  
いたずらに

わがみよにふる  
ながめせしみに

9

*Ono no Komachi (Lady)*

Color from the flowers  
Having already passed away,  
On trivial things, in vain,

Have I set my gaze  
While passing through the world.

*One of the most famous poets in this anthology, Ono no Komachi was a noted beauty at Court, then became a mendicant nun, living well past the age of eighty while wandering about the countryside, regarded by some as a holy woman and by some as simply mad. Many poems, plays, tales, and prints take her as their subject. Active around 850 C.E., she is one of the Six Laureates and Thirty-Six Immortal Poets.*

*This poem, unlike her earlier love poetry, appears to foreshadow (or was written in) Komachi's later years. She contrasts a shallow appreciation for beauty with the clarity that comes with an unsentimental, perhaps Buddhist, approach.*



*The Old Nurse envisions peasants at work on assorted tasks in spring, recovering from winter, preparing for the year — a rice paddy is cultivated; barrels are stacked in a side room of a farmhouse, waiting to be filled over the summer; a door has been dismounted and is being cleaned or repainted (perhaps it is being repapered). Through all this passes an old woman, leaning on a cane. She pauses to look intently at the evanescent cherry blossoms — knowing she may not pass this way again.*

## Ten

All my life  
I have been half deaf.  
In my room

I steam rice, make tea,  
dress myself  
to meet people.

I make them tell me  
their names twice,  
then help them as I can.

Though I play no lute,  
I hope they will feel  
as though hearing one

lilt among trees.

*Risa, at the time she wrote her responses, was undergoing a midlife crisis and lived temporarily in a room with shared kitchen and bath, known as a "quad," near the campus where she worked. Living without feeling especially poor on an allowance of \$425 a month, she possessed a shelf of books, a bicycle, some clothes, a few dishes, a laptop, a rice cooker, and an Appalachian dulcimer. She often played the dulcimer while her rice and dandelions were steaming, and thought about the lives of her student workers. A university is a place of transition, very like a crossroads. The bit about "telling their names twice" refers to her lifelong deafness. She felt there were parallels between her exile and Semimaru's — and while she has never been in line to become an empress, she did recover her mission, during this time, to become her true self.*

せみまる

これやこの  
ゆくもかえるも  
わかれては

しるもしらぬも  
おうさかのせき

10

*Semimaru*

Truly, this is where  
Travelers who go or come  
Over parting ways —

Friends or strangers — all must meet  
At the gate of "Meeting Hill."

*Active in the 900s C.E., Semimaru was said to have been in line to become Emperor, but was disqualified by blindness. He moved out of Kyoto to a hillside near a crossroads, built a hermitage, wrote poetry, and studied and taught the Biwa, an instrument translated here as "lute." He took a compassionate interest in the stream of humanity passing by, as a emblem of the impermanence of all things.*



*Hokusai, in an incomplete drawing for a woodcut, shows Semimaru leaning on a staff at the entrance to his hut, listening to the movement of passers-by. From his posture and expression, Semimaru seems to have achieved some measure of enlightened resignation. While this was not, perhaps, the life for which he had trained, he made it his own.*

## Eleven

I walk on sand  
and think to join  
the gulls. We'll seek

a route across waves,  
leaving behind  
so many troubles.

The dory-boatmen  
launch through surf,  
eyes picking their way

through rocks ahead.

*Risa is thinking of the fishing fleet at Pacific City, Oregon, where she often walks the beach alone, sorting through thoughts and feelings. Due to the sheltering effect of the cape and Haystack Rock, fishermen may launch directly from the beach, then swing round and go straight out into the Pacific. Sometimes one can walk for three hours without meeting anyone but sea lions or harbor seals; it's a good way to appreciate exile for a moment.*

さんぎたかむら

わたのはら  
やそしまかけて  
こぎいでぬと

ひとにはつげよ  
あまのつりぶね

11

*Sangi Takamura*

O'er the wide, wide sea,  
Toward its many distant isles,  
Rowing I set forth.

This, to all the world proclaim,  
O boats of fisher-folk!

*Active in the 800s C.E., Sangi Takamura, an Imperial counselor, displeased the Emperor and was banished.*



*Will these ama divers and their rowers remember him to the people? Given what she shows us here, the Old Nurse appears to be skeptical.*



## Twelve

When first we came  
to the Country Fair,  
strange players wove

their spell round us  
in lazing noon:  
no one thought

the day should ever  
end. Had we all  
turned into crows,

would we have been  
surprised?

*Risa attended a performance by a famous illusionist on a stage set beneath the open sky, and has quite never gotten over the experience.*

そうじょうへんじょう

あまつかぜ  
くものかよいじ  
ふきとしよ

をとめのすがた  
しばしとどめん

12

*Sojo Henjo (monk)*

Winds of Heaven!  
In paths among clouds  
Blow, and close up the ways,

That we may these virgin forms  
Yet a little while detain.

*A member of the royal family, Sojo Henjo served as an officer of the Court and, upon the death of the emperor, became a monk. He was active in the 800s C.E. and is regarded as one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals. He is said to have been one of the lovers of Ono no Komachi.*



*A quite literal rendering of the scene as Henjo might have remembered it. Two young women of high rank are performing the "heavenly" dance, assisted by a small orchestra, and one of the courtiers, presumably Henjo, instead of looking stolidly ahead of him like the other ranking men present, is rather slyly peeking. This dance is influential in Japanese performance arts to this day.*

## Thirteen

The deepening river  
flows toward sea:  
we may here

sit together  
without words.  
Couples pass, smiling  
  
despite hard rain.

*Risa is thinking of the way a relationship can envelop lovers in their own "bubble." Their difficulties may seem more trivial, perhaps, when viewed from such a space.*

ようぜいいん

つくばねの  
みねよりおつる  
みなのがわ

こいぞつもりて  
ふちとなりぬる

13

*Yozei In*

From Tsukuba's peak,  
Falling waters have become  
Mina's still, full flow –

So my love has grown to be  
Like the river: deep.

*Yozei became Emperor at age eight, in 877 C.E. . Attacked by mental illness that made him prone to violence, he was forcibly deposed at fifteen by his courtiers and lived in retirement to the age of eighty-one. Here he produces a simple but striking simile, reinforced by a play on words.*



*Hokusai's image for this poem is an unfinished work depicting common people near a stream ford, presumably of the Mina River, with mountains in the distance. They are both men and women; and Tsukuba, the name of the mountain, is written with the character for "man" and "woman."*

## Fourteen

Wherever this is,  
you are the fixed point;  
though flooded

by all this emotion,  
I am smooth  
river basalt —

indestructible for you.

*Risa, when reading the collection's Poem Fourteen, was struck by Toru's title, "Minister of the Left Bank (of the River)" and by Basho's account of having sought out the Shinobu dyeing-stone referenced in Toru's poem. So she compared her love for her beloved to a basalt river-stone.*

かわらのさだいじん

みちのくの  
しのぶもじずり  
たれゆえに

みだれそめにし  
われならなくに

14

*Kawara no Sadaijin*

Michinoku print  
Of Shinobu's tangled leaves!  
For whose sake have I, too,

Become confused?  
Only yours! I cannot change!

*Grandson of an emperor, Minamoto no Toru, active in the 800s C.E., is here listed under the title of Kawara no Sadaijin. A member of the important Genji clan, he is said to have been a model for one of the characters in Murasaki Shikibu's Tale of Genji.*





*As visualized by the Old Nurse, travelers appear to be asking the way to somewhere and a local farmer is pointing into a vanishing distance; perhaps their destination is Shinobu in Michinoku, where the dyeing-stone for the "Michinoku" fern-pattern prints lay. Shinobu's present-day name is Fukushima City.*

## Fifteen

I watched the nurse  
with her blue spoon  
badgering our nana.

The old woman  
stitched up her mouth  
with what will

she had — she would  
choose her time,  
her place, her way.

*Risa was tree-planting on a Forest Service contract in the 1970s, high in the Calapooya Mountains. Late at night she dreamed a young woman came to see her, surrounded by an aura of many colors. Risa asked if the woman was okay, and her visitor answered, "I'm fine now."*

*Grandma had been a hard and unapproachable person. Risa worked up the courage to really speak to her for the first time. "I never told you I loved you."*

*"It's all right. I knew it just the same."*

*Risa awoke in tears and skipped work the next day, driving to town to place a long-distance phone call to her parents.*

*"Did Grandma die last night?"*

*"Yes, she did, dear, about four o'clock in the morning."*

こうこうてんのう

きみがため  
はるののにいでて  
わかなつむ

わがころもでに  
ゆはふりつつ

15

*(Emperor) Koko Tenno*

It is for your sake  
I trudge white fields in spring,  
Gathering green herbs –

While my garment's hanging sleeves  
Are with snow bespattered.

*Emperor Koko reigned and wrote during the 800s C.E. . Here he is said to be viewing the snow (and perhaps seeking out medicines) for a shut-in relative.*



*Hokusai's exploratory drawing for this poem languishes in a private collection and has never been reproduced so far as we know; it is said to resemble this one by Kuniyoshi.*

## Sixteen

We plant fir  
seedlings across  
icy slopes.

Trees yet standing  
scrape and worry  
in moaning winds,

showering us with  
bark and cones.  
Will I see you

again, should one  
of these fall  
while my back

is bent?

*Risa remembers planting in rain along the top edge of a clearcut with tall trees towering above her; wind shoving the trees back and forth, showering her with twigs and cones. The thought occurred to her that she could die here, her love unfulfilled.*

ちゅうなごんゆきひら

たちわかれ  
いなばのやまの  
みねにおうる

まつとしきかば  
いまかえりこん

16

*Chunagon Yukihiro*

Though we are apart,  
If on Mount Inaba's peak  
I hear the sound

Of pine trees growing,  
Back at once I'll make my way.

*Ariwara no Yukihiro, here called by his title of Chunagon (Councillor), was brother to Narihira. Their poems were often published together. The pine trees wait patiently for the right conditions to open their cones, showering the mountainside with spiraling seeds — this makes a sound like rain.*



*Hokusai does not appear to have made a print for this poem; here is the one produced by Kuniyoshi. Peasant workmen, as well as the lord, appear to hear the pines of Mount Inaba.*

## Seventeen

Removing hot  
boots, we hung them  
by laces and crossed

the stone-floored stream  
on shocked feet.  
Work-weary as we

were, we stopped  
to see maple finery  
skip past wet knees.

*Risa remembers an incident in her tree-planting days, in which a crew member went missing overnight in the woods, sparking an all-day search. Her team of searchers crossed a small river with swift, cold water and poor footing, yet stopped in mid-stream to admire the color of fallen big-leaf maple leaves, rushing down with the current. To this day she has few memories so vivid as that moment.*



ありわらのなりひらあそん

ちはやぶる  
かみよもきかず  
たつたがわ

からくれないに  
みずくくるとは

17

*Ariwara no Narihira Ason*

I have never heard  
That, even when the gods held sway  
In ancient days,

Ever was water bound with red  
Such as here in Tatsuta's stream.

*Narihira, a member of the royal family who spent much of his life in relative exile due to, it is said, inappropriate romantic entanglements, is said to have inspired the Tales of Ise and may also have been one of the models drawn upon by Murasaki Shikibu for Prince Genji. Active in the 800s C.E., he is referred to as one of the Six Great Waka Poets and the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals.*



*The Tatsuta River is popular with poets for its display of floating leaves of the Japanese Maple in autumn, and it is referred to as "died" by the leaves. Old Nurse visualizes a man who has apparently fallen in the stream and whose clothing is now red, to the amusement of his friends. Perhaps there is a sly reference to Narihira, whose amorous escapades "died" him with a reputation that ultimately injured his career.*

## Eighteen

Even to dream  
may shatter  
my world.

What name  
did I speak to  
the night?

*Risa is remembering a time when love was complicated, to say the least, so her poem is practically a paraphrase of the collection's eighteenth tanka.*

ふじわらのとしゆきあそん

すみのえの  
きしによるなみ  
よるさえや

ゆめのかよいじ  
ひとめよくらん

18

*Fujiwara no Toshiyuki Ason*

See the gathered waves  
On the shore of Sumi's bay —  
Even in gathered night,

When in dreams I come to you,  
I must shun the eyes of men.

*Fujiwara no Toshiyuki was a Heian dynasty aristocrat and poet, active in the 900s C.E., and one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse shows us a ship, presumably on Sumi Bay (in present-day Osaka) from which two hidden lovers peek forth. One commentator remarks that they are not a particularly attractive couple — perhaps Nurse sees peasants or crew members, and not aristocrats — in keeping with her subversive findings elsewhere.*

## Nineteen

How beautiful  
your hands, tapping  
my door, thirty

years ago.  
Your heart knocked,  
a fist against

my ribs. You  
have been dead  
half those years.

*Risa remembers a love who has died. She, too, in a sense, feels left behind, frozen in time as life goes unheedingly on round her. All tragedy ultimately is felt as solitude.*

いせ

なにわがた  
みじかきあしの  
ふしのまも

あわでこのよを  
すぐしてよとや

19

*(Lady) Ise*

Even for a space  
Short as joint of tiny reed  
From Naniwa's marsh,

We must never meet again  
In this life? This, do you ask?

*Lady Ise, active at the beginning of the 900s C.E., was a concubine of the emperor. Educated and talented, she was a noted poet in the Imperial style, and many of her poems were published in her lifetime.*



*Old Nurse spies the lady watching, perhaps in vain, from a window across Osaka Bay (Naniwa). Time for her now seems to stand still, though she is well provided for; she has an attendant, a gardener is working below the window, roofers are tiling her roof, and the farmers in the rice fields carry on as they have always done. A fog is rolling in from lower right.*



## Twenty

Between us,  
some three hundred  
miles of ice? —

It's not so much.

*Three syllables short of a haiku, Risa's response to the twentieth tanka recalls a journey she undertook on a motorcycle during an ice-out. Madness, but that's love.*

もとよししんのう

わびぬれば  
いまはたおなじ  
なにわなる

みをつくしても  
あわんとぞおもふ

20

*(Prince) Motoyoshi Shinno*

Now, in dire distress,  
It is all the same to me!  
So, then, let us meet

Though it cost my life  
In the Bay of Naniwa.

*The Prince (active 900s C.E. ) was noted for affairs of the heart, and a number of his poems appear in the Tales of Yamato.*



*Hosukai's Old Nurse appears to envision Motoyoshi (or perhaps his lady friend) en route to an assignation along the shores of Naniwa (Osaka) Bay, disguised as a sheaf of grain. Ladies seem to avert their gaze, tipping their umbrellas so as not to witness the strange sight — perhaps everyone saw through him?*

## Twenty-One

I await you.  
People pass  
and glance,

curious. I do not  
mind; you may  
arrive or you

may not. What I  
have done, I have done.

*Risa remembers waiting at night for one who promised to come to her. On this occasion, perhaps unusually so, she was able to compose herself—what was to be, would be. Perhaps she was, that night, remembering times when she herself had never arrived.*

そせいほうし

いまこんと  
いいしばかりに  
ながつきの

ありあけのつきを  
まちいでつるかな

21

*Sosei Hoshi (monk)*

Just because you said,  
"In a moment I will come,"  
I've awaited you

Even until dawn's moon,  
In the long month, has appeared.

*Sosei, son of the author of poem eleven, was a court officer before becoming a monk. Many of his poems remain extant, and he is one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals.*



*Old Nurse seems to regard the poem's speaker as female. Is the man being led by torchlight up the temple path her lover? And why is he carrying a set of keys? Perhaps it is her husband!*

## Twenty-Two

The mountain wind  
comes to me,  
speaking your  
  
wild thoughts.

*Risa remembers a lover whose mind and actions ranged wide and unpredictably, like a mountain wind.*

ふんやのやすひで

ふくからに  
あきのくさきの  
しをるれば

むべやまかぜを  
あらしというらん

22

*Bunya no Yasuhide*

Since by its breath  
Autumn's leaves  
Torn are and wasted,

Men may to the mountain wind  
Give the name "The Wild."

*There is almost no information on the life of Yasuhide; he is however listed among the Six and Thirty-Six exemplary poets.*





*Old Nurse shows us a mountaintop festival disrupted by a sudden gust.*

## Twenty-Three

New wrinkles  
in my hands  
are well matched

to those in yours.  
Now we have loved,  
we cannot die.

*Risa is thinking here of the discovery by lovers that they are no longer young. It happens.*

おおえのちさと

つきみれば  
ちぢにものこそ  
かなしけれ

わがみひとつの  
あきにはあらねど

23

*Oe no Chisato*

Gazing at the moon,  
thoughts arise  
And those thoughts are sad –

Yet not for me alone  
Has autumn come.

*Chisato is said to have been a nephew of Yukihiro and to have been influenced by Chinese poetry.*



*Old Nurse, in Hokusai's unfinished print, represents heavy-laden peasants moving about the paths among the fields beneath a harvest moon. Age is given more than it can carry, perhaps, but the harvest is nevertheless brought in.*

## Twenty-Four

I followed him  
to the red  
mountain slope,

there to accept  
what only time  
could give.

*Risa is remembering her best years were spent earning a meager living on mountainsides in all seasons, all weathers, among those she loved. Fall foliage has come to symbolize those years for her, the turning of the year being a sign of endings and beginnings.*

かんけ

このたびは  
ぬさもとあえず  
たむけやま

もみじのにしき  
かみのまにまに

24

*Kan Ke (Sugiwara no Michizane)*

At the present time,  
As I could bring no offering,  
See, Mount Tamuke!

Here are brocades of red leaves  
For the pleasure of the god.

*Michizane, a courtier active in the 800s C.E., was also a scholar and teacher. He was exiled by the emperor and a series of misfortunes followed, with catastrophes to the capital and the royal family. Subsequently Michizane's good name was restored in an effort to propitiate his spirit, and he is now a Shinto deity. His poems in the Chinese manner are considered especially good.*



*Old Nurse shares the Emperor's cart traveling (to a shrine) in autumn, the time of year referenced in the poem, with red leaves descending all round. Michizane would have had to wait to make his offering after the Emperor was done doing so, and his poem makes the leaves themselves an offering which would never have to wait — a leveling sort of poem that could be taken as subversive: in effect, "we are all equal before the gods." The ox has balked, and the cart is, at the moment, going nowhere — possibly a reference to the oxen that carried Michizane to his grave, and which also balked.*

## Twenty-Five

As you gaze, I  
avert my eyes  
lest breath stop.

Behind you, leaves  
paint the sun  
while sparrows

sing on.

*Risa remembers standing on an island's shore, braiding her hair, and  
discovering the strange power of being beheld by a certain someone.*



さんじょうのうだいじん

なにしおわば  
おうさかやまの  
さねかずら

ひとにしられで  
くるよしもがな

25

*Sanjo Udaijin (Fujiwara no Sadakata)*

If your name be true,  
Trailing vine of "Meeting Hill,"  
Is there not some way

Whereby in secret  
I may draw you to my side?

*Fujiwara no Sadakata was active around 900-920 C.E. and a member of a family of poets. This poem needs little explanation — furtive love being one of the principal topoi of ancient Japanese and Chinese poetry. This tanka is laced with erotic double entendres.*



*Old Nurse, in this unfinished image, has a relatively straightforward interpretation, showing a woman, followed by attendants, well-wrapped for an incognito journey. Is the merchant looking at her and laughing? Perhaps he find the upper-class penchant for secrecy amusing. Is the lover watching from the door of that house, leaving all the risk of illicit travel to her?*

## Twenty-Six

As I pass through,  
I may touch ash,  
Hemlock, fir,

spruce, alder,  
maple, cedar,  
madrone, yew,

willow, dark  
myrtle, but –  
not you.

*Risa remembers walking through the woods in a particularly lovely place  
on the North Fork of Middle Fork of the Willamette River, and wishing her  
love could be there to experience it with her.*

ていしんこう

をぐらやま  
みねのもみじば  
こころあらば

いまひとたびの  
みゆきまたなん

26

*Teishin Ko (Fujiwara no Tadahira)*

If the maple leaves  
On the ridge of Ogura  
Have the gift of mind,

They will longingly await  
One more august pilgrimage.

*Mount Ogura is inland to the west of Edo/Tokyo. Its name means "place where the god lives." It was famous for its fall foliage. The retired Emperor asked the poet to invite his son, the current Emperor, to view the scenery there, and the poem was the result.*



*Hokusai simply depicts the moment of the invitation (presumably the first recitation of the poem), with some exemplary fall foliage as part of the backdrop.*

## Twenty-Seven

When you asked  
if you might  
walk with me,

I said yes,  
then looked  
away. It is ...

a thing we do.

*Risa remembers walking along a river with one who loved her — and  
whose glance she found unsettling.*

ちゅうなごんかねすけ

みかのはら  
わきてながるる  
いづみがわ

いつみきとてか  
こいしかるらん

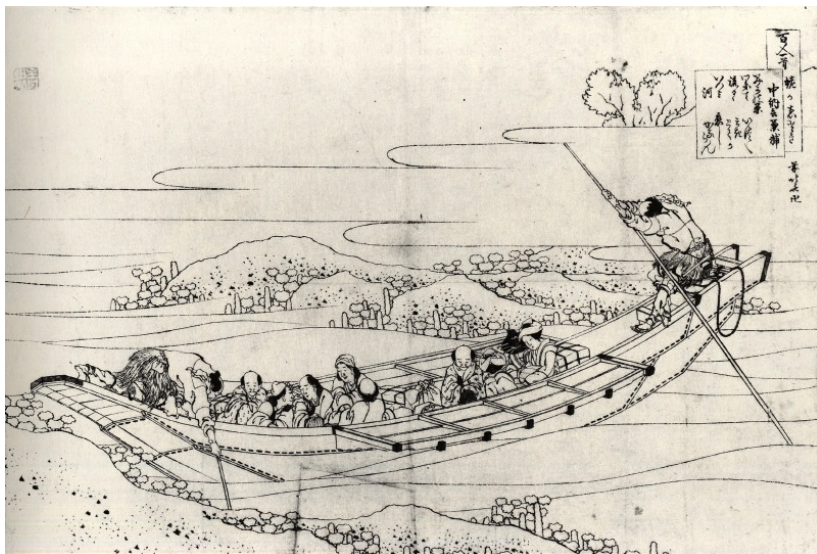
27

*Chunagon Kanesuke*

Over Mika's plain,  
Gushing forth and flowing free,  
Is Izumi's stream.

I know not if we have met:  
Why, then, do I long for her?

*The great-grandfather of Lady Murasaki, Chunagon Kanesuke was one of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets. His home was a resort of poets and artists.*



*Old Nurse presents a ferry boat on the river named in the poem, which flows east from the hills into Osaka Bay. There may be two small groups of passengers, and neither group takes notice of the other. Or do they? Perhaps the poet is in one of these, and the object of his notice is in the other. And now perhaps he does not well remember this chance meeting — only the longing.*



## Twenty-Eight

In white silence  
my muffled boots  
made rounds.

Where I looked,  
I saw no tracks  
but mine.

*Risa remembers her friends making an extended "town run," awaiting better weather before their work could recommence. She tended camp and keenly experienced the solitude as a great good.*

みなもとのむねゆきあそん

やまざとは  
ふゆぞさびしさ  
まさりける

ひとめもくさも  
かれぬとおもえば

28

*Minamoto no Muneyuki Ason*

Winter loneliness  
In a mountain hamlet grows  
Only deeper, when

Guests are gone, and leaves and grass  
Withered are ...

*Minamoto no Muneyuki was a grandson of an Emperor and is regarded as one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals. The silence that falls after the departure of guests is a traditional subject.*



*Old Nurse really outdoes herself here. She imagines the mountain village long deserted, perhaps for decades. Hunters, who have no idea, perhaps, of who may have lived here, use the rotted timbers as firewood. The smoke drifts away past the wrecked and snow-drifted dwelling. This is one of Hokusai's masterworks.*

## Twenty-Nine

I could not know  
you waited for me here —  
The falling petals

had already obscured  
your steps.

*Risa's response poem is fairly straightforward. She hopes to evoke the memory of a missed appointment through the symbolism of fallen petals. Perhaps they are white chrysanthemum, and the color of the mums symbolizes a lasting regret, perhaps even the end of a relationship.*

おおしこうちのみつね

こころあてに  
をらばやをらん  
はつしもの

おきまどはせる  
しらぎくのはな

29

*Oshikochi no Mitsune*

If it were my wish  
White chrysanthemum to cull —  
Puzzled by the frost

Of early autumn —  
I may pluck the flower.

*Oshikochi Mitsune, a court official and regional governor, was active around 900 C.E. . He was very successful in poetic culture and many of his poems survive. He was listed as one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals.*



*Hokusai's series of woodcuts for the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu is incomplete and this is one of the poems for which we have nothing from his hand. Here is one by Kuniyoshi, depicting a dramatic moment in an ill-fated relationship between a monk and his acolyte. They have carried out a suicide pact which the priest has survived; the youth will be reborn as a woman the priest will meet in his old age. The youth's name is a pun for the word for chrysanthemum.*

## Thirty

Once we had made up  
our minds that you  
should leave at morning —

we each in our way  
prayed dawn should never  
come.

*Risa's response poem should be self-explanatory. It rests on the alternate interpretation to the anthology's thirtieth poem, which has been thought to represent a lover's complaint against being made to wait fruitlessly (a common theme in Japanese literature of the times) but could also mean a lover's complaint against the shortness of the night.*

みぶのただみね

ありあけの  
つれなくみえし  
わかれより

あかつきばかり  
うきものはなし

30

*Mibu no Tadamine*

The morning moon,  
Cold, unpitying.  
Since that parting hour,

Nothing I dislike so much  
As the breaking light of day.

*Tadamine was one of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, as well as a noted critic, active around 900 C.E. .*





*Old Nurse prefers the second meaning also, and visualizes two farmers or tradesmen of the lower classes encountering the lover after the lady (that dramatic pose, supporting herself on the gatepost — it could not be her servant) has seen him off at the gate. They make the appropriate obeisances — does he return the bow, or is he simply bowed with sadness at the foggy dawn?*

## Thirty-One

Snow plumed straight down  
like river foam.  
I knew where

the trees were,  
loading themselves  
with white —

but could not  
find them.

*Risa remembers the morning after one of her very first nights in the Oregon woods, parked in her truck camper in a location where she was to be picked up for a day's work. She awoke to find herself snowed in, with more than a foot of snow accumulated, and more falling silently in large bewildering clumps. She could recognize nothing from the day before, and was enchanted with the scene. She made up her mind on the spot that Oregon would be her permanent home.*

さかのうえのこれのり

あさぼらけ  
ありあけのつきと  
みるまでに

よしののさとに  
ふれるしらゆき

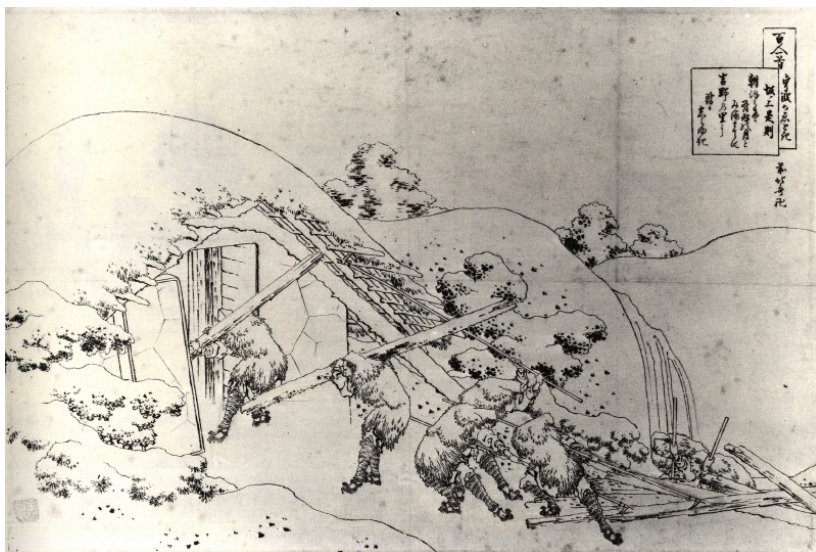
31

*Sakanoue no Korenori*

At the break of day,  
Just as though the morning moon  
Lightened the dim scene,

Yoshino's fair hamlet lay  
In a haze of falling snow.

*Sakanoue no Korinori, active circa 900 C.E., is one of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets and is represented in a number of Imperial anthologies. The poem is set in winter in Yoshino in what is now Nara Prefecture, where there is a famous waterfall. A century later, Yoshitsune is said to have washed his horse there, and Hokusai has a famous wood engraving of this event.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse envisions the waterfall in winter; with a crew of workmen braving the snow to bring in wood, perhaps into a bathhouse.*

## Thirty-Two

I remember you  
alive, finding  
red salmon

in a pool. They whirled,  
autumn leaves —  
no place to go.

*Risa's friend identified with the trapped salmon — perhaps too well.*

はるみちのつらき

やまがわに  
かぜのかけたる  
しがらみは

ながれもあえぬ  
もみちなりけり

32

*Harumichi no Tsuraki*

In a mountain stream  
Built by busy wind,  
Lies a wattled barrier.

Yet 'tis only maple leaves  
Powerless to flow away.

*Harumichi no Tsuraki was a court poet and graduate of the imperial university, active in the early 900s C.E. . Few of his poems are now known.*



*Old Nurse visualizes the river with the leaves tumbling down in a strong current; a man appears to be fishing them out to fill a basket. On a small footbridge a woman waits for her child and his pet turtle. Filling much of the scene there is a lumberyard with square timbers, and sawyers are cutting boards from one of the timbers. At the foot of the sawing sits a "saw-doctor" filing and setting saw teeth. Hetty Litjens suggests the imagery represents "resistances," an interpretation of the poet's difficulties (perhaps in crossing the mountain, or at court, or in personal life, or all three).*

## Thirty-Three

Again we missed  
bloom on the cherry.  
What season

for us now  
is not swift?

*Risa here invokes the sense which elders (and she is one) have of time passing more quickly as we age. She and her beloved barely catch the cherries blooming any more. The blossoms often come and are gone unwitnessed.*



きのともりの

ひさかたの  
ひかりのどけき  
はるのひに

しづごころなく  
はなのちるらん

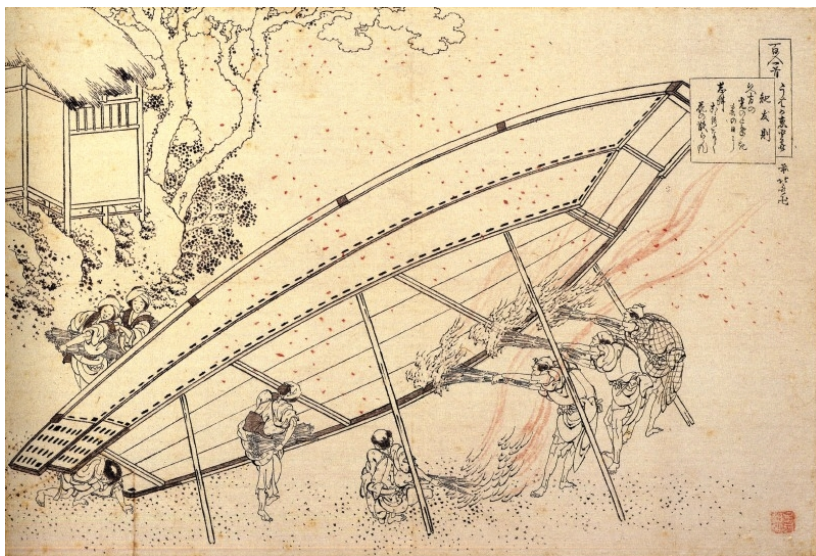
33

*Ki no Tomonori*

In the cheerful light  
Of the glowing sun  
In spring,

Why with such haste  
Falls the cherry's bloom?

*Ki no Tomonori, court poet, was active in the 800s C.E. and both a Poetry Immortal and an anthologist. His poem appears to highlight the yearning we have for sunshine and cheerfulness by suggesting that the cherry blossoms have an insufficient appreciation for these things, turning from them to fall to earth so soon.*



*Old Nurse sees the blossoms scattering over a boat being re-sealed for a summer's work. The men are intent on their business; they, too, it seems, under-appreciate spring.*

## Thirty-Four

Where you and I  
gathered apples,  
I now gather tears.

*Loss is universal.*

ふじわらのおきかぜ

たれをかも  
しるひとにせん  
たかさごの

まつもむかしの  
ともならなくに

34

*Fujiwara no Okikaze*

Who gathers there now,  
In these days, that  
I can hold as friends?

Even Takasago's pines  
Are not friends as before.

*Fujiwara no Okikaze, active in the 900s C.E., was one of the Thirty-six Poetry Immortals and had poems included in several imperial poetry anthologies, including Kokin Wakashū.*



*Old Nurse presents a relaxed group of people hanging round the famous pine, doing exactly what the poet rues having lost. It's almost as though she is taunting him for his attachment.*

## Thirty-Five

New sap, rising  
in the solitary  
peach, ran from

an open wound.

*Risa suddenly remembers that at the age of perhaps seven or eight she  
watched sap ooze from a damaged peach tree in full bloom on a windy day.  
It was her introduction to the power of Spring.*

きのつらゆき

ひとはいさ  
こころもしらず  
ふるさとは

はなぞむかしの  
かににおいける

35

*Ki no Tsurayuki*

As for man, who can tell  
What is in his heart?  
But the plum's sweet flower

In my birthplace, as before,  
Still emits the same perfume.

*Ki no Tsurayuki, a courtier and one of the Thirty-six Poetry Immortals, was active after 890 C.E. . He was a poet, editor and critic. Tsurayuki returns after a long absence and is greeted by his friend. He notices the blooming plum and recites the poem, and his friend responds with a poem that notes that he, the host, planted this tree in honor of Tsurayuki.*



*Old Nurse notes the arrival of the lordly poet/administrator; but foregrounds the scene with workmen renewing a house for the year (a traditional spring activity). Perhaps, like his host, she is reminding the great lord that relationships should be maintained to be truly savored.*



## Thirty-Six

I moved our bed  
to the river's edge.  
The moonlit waters

flooded my heart  
all night.

*Risa remembers working an early-summer forestry contract in Idaho in unexpectedly hot weather. Pulling the "family bed" from her truck, she tried to sleep by the riverbank, where it was coolest, but the moonlight combined with the absence of her beloved conspired to keep her awake.*

きよはらのふかやぶ

なつのよは  
まだよひながら  
あけぬるを

くものいずこに  
つきやどるらん

36

*Kiyowara no Fukayabu*

In the summer night,  
While evening still seems here,  
Dawn is coming.

In what region of the clouds  
Has the wandering moon hidden?

*Kiyohara no Fukayabu was perhaps active in the 10th century C.E. . He authored seventeen poems in the Kokinwakashu. He was the grandfather of Kiyohara no Motosuke, and the great-grandfather of Sei Shonagon.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse envisions boats on the river carrying on by the light of the summer moon even though there is an overcast. She highlights the lives of the boatmen (on their "graveyard" shift) rather than the party of nobles who are mostly out of frame at left — hidden, like the moon.*

## Thirty-Seven

I become wary  
of the huckleberries  
inveigling ice down

my neck, no matter  
how I turn.

*Risa remembers that when she worked in the woods, frost scattered before  
her like the dew, and sometimes got underneath her collar.*

ふんやのあさやす

しらつゆに  
かぜのふきしく  
あきののは

つらぬきとめぬ  
たまぞちりける

37

*Bunya no Asayasu*

In the autumn fields  
When the restless winds comb  
The heedless dew

The unstrung pearls  
are scattered round.

*Bunya [or Fun'ya] no Asayasu, active around the beginnings of the 900s C.E., is said to have composed this poem at the request of the Emperor.*



*An autumnal task in progress on a windy morning: workers, or perhaps young courtiers, are out in a boat gathering lotus "water lily" pads, perhaps for the Emperor. The dew has already been blown about, like loose pearls. Those who work out-of-doors will recognize the posture of Hokusai's boatmen, who shrink from the biting wind of approaching winter.*

## Thirty-Eight

I drove through  
endless rain,  
seeking one merchant

who might give aid  
to an empty hand.

*Risa remembers an occasion on which she had broken a promise to a child. She went out in a terrible rainstorm, stopping at one place of business after another, seeking just the right gift to smooth over the hurt. But, of course, no purchased gift can replace steadfastness.*

うこん

わすらるる  
みをばおもはず  
ちかひてし

ひとのいのちの  
をしくもあるかな

38

*(Lady) Ukon*

Though cast aside,  
For myself I do not care:  
But *you* had sworn an oath –

That the gods withhold vengeance  
Is all I ask now.

*Ukon was a prolific Court poet of the 900s C.E., very much in demand for contests and special occasions, and later accorded honor as one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals. In this poem, when abandoned by her husband, she asks the gods not to strike him (thereby underlining the seriousness of his breach of faith).*





*The Old Nurse, who seems to favor the keeping of promises, shows the lady already in supplication at a Shinto shrine, which perhaps she has paid to renew. Her retainers are carrying burdens — perhaps offerings.*

## Thirty-Nine

I did not expect  
to meet you here,  
gazing

from this horizon.

*Risa is here startled by the color of sunrise on a bank of clouds — so like a  
remembered lover's eyes.*

さんぎひとし

あさじうの  
をののしのはら  
しのぶれど

あまりてなどか  
ひとのこいしき

39

*Sangi Hitoshi (Minamoto no Hitoshi)*

Bamboo-growing plain,  
With a field bearing small reeds —  
Though I bear my lot,

Why is it too much to bear?  
Why do I still love her so?

*Sangi Hitoshi was a court official in the 900s C.E. and served in the provinces. He is known mostly by this poem of unrequited or forbidden love.*



*Old Nurse shows the poet observing a desolate landscape shrouded in fog, with two retainers in waiting. Workmen carrying heavy burdens appear at lower right; perhaps they are being held up by the gentry. There may be a subversive commentary on the heaviness of the lord's "burden."*

## Forty

My friends lean  
Across the table.  
My breath stops.

What was it  
They saw?

*Risa, who has never been able to conceal her feelings, can relate to the fortieth poem in the collection. There is really no hiding anything, especially concerning love, from those who know you.*

たいらのかねもり

しのぶれど  
いろにいでにけり  
わがこいは

ものやおもうと  
ひとのとうまで

40

*Taira no Kanemori*

Though I would conceal it,  
In my face, it appears —  
My foolish secret love.

So much so, my friend asks of me,  
"Does not something trouble you?"

*Taira no Kanemori, active in the 900s C.E., was governor of Echigo province and a noted poet. He is one of the Thirty-six Poetry Immortals, and a number of his poems survive in collections. Here, he drops in on a friend, trying to be casual, but his distraction gives him away.*



*Slyly, Old Nurse envisions people lined up for a reading from a physiognomist. Surely, under the gaze of the specialist with the magnifying glass, our poet will be found out. Better put this off!*

## Forty-One

Those waiting  
at the breakfast  
table understood —

though they had not  
been told.

*Risa has seen this often, especially among women: emotions seem to communicate themselves around the corner, down the street, and into the room without a word said.*



みぶのただみ

こいすちょう  
わがなはまだき  
たちにけり

ひとしれずこそ  
おもいそめしか

41

*Mibu no Tadami*

Though indeed I love,  
Yet news of my love  
Had gone far and wide

When no one could know  
That I had begun to love.

*Mibu no Tadami was a court poet and a designated member of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals; many of his poems are extant. The story goes that this poem and the preceding one were produced as a contest, and that Emperor preferred the other one. But they have both been treasured ever since, so perhaps being runner-up is not always bad.*



Wikimedia: Kikuchi Yosai ( 菊池容斎 )

*There appears to be no work by Hokusai extant for this poem. Here is a portrait of the poet as imagined by Kikuchi Yosai, a nineteenth century painter.*

## Forty-Two

I have stood  
many times  
beside this ocean,

and still  
you have  
never seen it —

*Risa's poem would not much impress the Old Nurse. She has crossed a continent to begin a life without someone to whom she may have made promises. The decision will haunt her for the rest of her days.*

きよはらのもとすけ

ちぎりきな  
かたみにそでを  
しぼりつつ

すえのまつやま  
なみこさじとは

42

*Kiyowara no Motosuke*

Have we not been pledged  
By the wringing of our sleeves,  
Each for each in turn –

That over Sué's Mount of Pines  
Ocean waves shall never pass?

*Kiyowara no Motosuke (or Kiyohara) was a poet and literary editor active in the 900s C.E. . He was one of the compilers of the Gosen Wakashū. He served twice as a provincial governor and is regarded as one of the Thirty-six Poetry Immortals.*



*Hokusai produces for this poem a courtier, perhaps the poet, whose palanquin has been set down for the moment, and to whom someone, in an attitude of obsequious respect, appears to be explicating the poem by indicating an item of cloth being wrung out by the seaside, where it has been soaked. A woman meanwhile sews another such cloth, listening in.*

*A promise holds great power and either keeping or breaking it can lead to widening circles of damage, thinks the Old Nurse. It's no good weeping over your vows unless your intentions and actions match.*

*Does the universe lie to itself?*

## Forty-Three

when you  
watched me

braid my hair —  
this beyond all  
that went before

sheds on my life  
continual light.

*Risa instead focuses on the moment when a relationship suddenly somehow intensifies the bonds of trust. "All /that went before" may refer to the earlier stages of the courtship, rather than to a promise glibly made and broken.*

ごんちゅうなごんあつただ

あいみでの  
のちのところに  
くらぶれば

むかしはものを  
おもわざりけり

43

*Chunagon Atsutada (Fujiwara no Atsutada)*

Having at last met my love,  
Afterwards my passion was,  
When I compared it

With my first feelings,  
As, if then, I had not loved.

*Chunagon Atsutada was a tenth century C.E. court nobleman and one of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets. He is of the same family line as the compiler of the anthology.*



*Atsutada's poem comes off a little trite in translation. Who has not experienced the presence of the beloved (or, especially, consummated love) as something unique to which the former imagination seems but a shadow?*

*But see what Hokusai's Old Nurse makes of it The poet is interpreted here as having jilted all past loves (perhaps even a wife) for the present beauty!*

*One of those "former loves" nails the man's effigy to a sacred tree, calling upon the local deity to force the miserable effigy to behold itself in the mirror upon her breast. How dare he break a sacred trust? Emotions are powerful, but relationships are meant to supersede them.*

*This print is one of Hokusai's masterpieces.*



## Forty-Four

One such night,  
we said, will do  
to make us not

have lived in vain:  
but these old words,  
so many times

repeated, surprised us —  
being true.

*Risa's response to Poem Forty-Four is the reverse of a translation, as she is remembering happiness, but with a hint that the views she is here expressing are so commonly expressed as to be trite. Except that they never are.*

ちゅうなごんあさただ

あうことの  
たえてしなくは  
なかなか

ひとをもみをも  
うらみざらまし

44

*Chunagon Asatada (Tomotada)*

If a trysting time  
There should never be at all,  
I should not complain

For myself oft left forlorn,  
Or of her, in heartless mood.

*Fujiwara no Asatada, active in the 900s C.E., was a courtier and poet, one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals. He was included in a number of collections and a collection of his poems is extant. MacCauley's translation of this poem is awkward; here is another from the University of Virginia:*

*If it should happen  
That we never met again,  
I would not complain;*

*And I doubt that she or I  
Would feel that we were left alone.*



*Peter Morse tells us that Hokusai's Old Nurse associates this poem with the legend of the White Fox Lady, here appearing to her husband and son after her death. It is the last day of the year, attested by a gathering of foxes in the background, breathing fire.*

## Forty-Five

I knew by the look  
you gave me, then,  
I had made again

some sad mistake —  
Yet looking back,  
I remember only

walking by the river,  
bending over pools  
for pretty stones.

*Risa is remembering a difficult moment which she found emblematic of a difficult relationship.*

けんとくこう

あわれとも  
いうべきひとは  
おもおえで

みのいたずらに  
なりぬべきかな

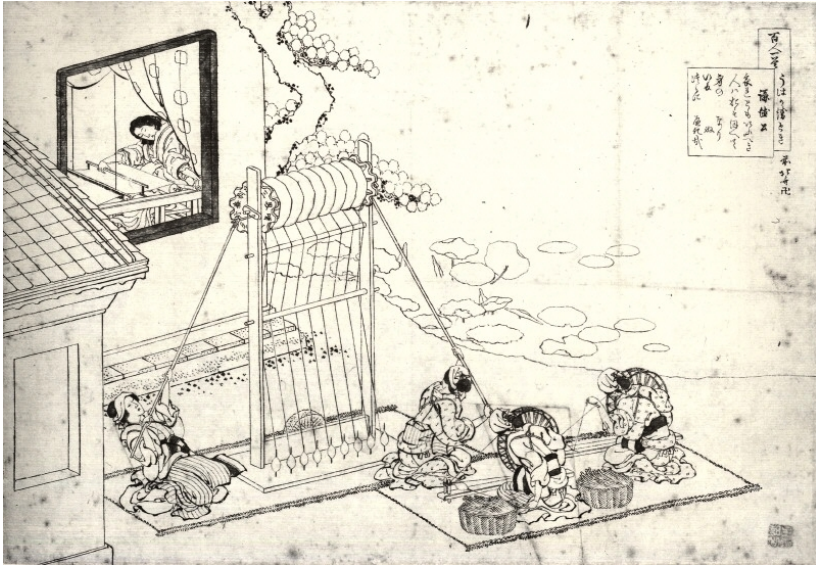
45

*Kentoku Ko (Fujiwara no Koretada)*

Sure that there is none  
Who will speak a pitying word,  
I shall pass away.

My death, alas, shall only be  
My own folly's fitting end.

*Fujiwara no Koretada, active in the 900s C.E., was made curator of poetry by the Emperor. He rose to a position of great importance. Descended from, and ancestor of, important poets, he appears in several collections. In the poem, his regret for an inappropriate love affair apparently hyperbolically extends to his entire career.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse sees a group of women spinning, winding and weaving thread. They resemble the Fates, and there is a suggestion, in the Buddhist texts on the monumental spinning wheel, that we create our own reality (thus creating the Fates — our destiny is in our own hands, not theirs, for we have only imagined them). Peter Morse quotes Keyes to the effect that these women are also a constellation in the sky, with Vega ("The Weaver") in the window, weaving sadly.*

## Forty-Six

This stream  
in winter cannot  
be crossed –

or only if you  
care not where  
you come ashore.

*Risa suggests her would-be lover should count the costs before committing under adverse conditions. It is very easy to drown in the river in winter! Especially if one's thoughts are occupied by things that may not even come to pass.*

そねのよしただ

ゆらのとを  
わたるふなびと  
かじをたえ

ゆくえもしらぬ  
こいのみちかな

46

*Sone no Yoshitada*

Like a mariner  
Sailing over Yura's strait  
With his rudder gone –

Whither, o'er the deep of love,  
Lies the goal, I do not know.

*Sone no Yoshitada, a minor provincial official, was not much appreciated as a poet in his own time but his reputation grew after his death. His imagery is often original, a quality sometimes not valued.*





*For this poem there is no known Hosukai print or drawing. Here is one thought to have been done by Hiroshige. In it, a woman, one of a famous pair of star-crossed lovers, is traveling in hopes of glimpsing her love — but she neither knows where he is nor where she is going. The boatman seems stunned — by her beauty, her tragedy, or both?*

## Forty-Seven

Wading that far  
river, turning over  
stones for caddis

flies unborn,  
you met no one –  
not even me.

*Risa's thoughts turn to spring and a moment of isolation in her beloved's life.*

えぎょうほうし

やえむぐら  
しげれるやどの  
さびしきに

ひとこそみえね  
あきはきにけり

47

*Eikei Hoshi (monk)*

To the humble cot,  
Overgrown with thick-leaved vines  
In its loneliness,

Comes the dreary autumn time —  
And not even man is there.

*The monk Eikei turns in a standard meditation on the evanescence of the human presence in a natural landscape. We build homes; we vanish; nature reclaims our works.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse, however, harks back to the time when human activity filled the scene. It is certainly autumn; geese fly away, a tree bears fruit; tobacco leaves dry under the eaves of the house; a man washes a horse; a woman brings the saddle; a woman and child winnow rice. These routine activities gain poignancy from the poem's view of a later time.*

## Forty-Eight

You offered water  
in a glass, and said:  
you must go.

I did; or tried —  
the tide returns.

*Risa remembers an occasion on which love suddenly became complicated.  
It was over, though it took years to become evident.*

みなもとのしげゆき

かぜをいたみ  
いわうつなみの  
おのれのみ

くだけてものを  
おもうころかな

48

*Minamoto no Shigeyuki*

Like a driven wave,  
Dashed by fierce winds on a rock,  
So it is, alas!

Crushed and all alone am I;  
Thinking over what has been.

*Minamoto no Shigeyuki, active in the late 900s C.E., was poet of the court.  
He is one of the Thirty-six Poetry Immortals.*



*There is no known Hokusai print or drawing extant for this poem. Here is one by Hiroshige. Contemplating a broken dish, the rejected lover may be thinking of her hopes, dashed as it were upon a rock. Though commonplace enough, this feeling is earth-shattering for the one experiencing it.*

## Forty-Nine

I thought I had  
no objection —  
but when you

returned, your  
glance offered  
only pity.

*Risa's poem recalls a particularly difficult moment in a relationship she thought she'd understood.*



おおなかとみのよしのぶあそん

みかきもり  
えじのたくひの  
よるはもえ

ひるはきえつつ  
ものをこそおもえ

49

*Onakatomi no Yoshinobu Ason*

Like the warder's fires  
At the Imperial gateway kept  
Burning through the night,

Buried in day's ashes  
Love still glows in me.

*Onakatomi no Yoshinobu, active in the 900s C.E., was an active compiler of poetry anthologies and one of the Thirty-six Poetry Immortals.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse envisions the moment at dawn, when the night watch has not yet been relieved and the men are lazily stretching and thinking, perhaps of their beds — while the lover sits, with his attendant, on the nearby bluff, musing on a distant or perhaps lost love.*

## Fifty

I said, believing it,  
as we stood  
beneath lilacs:

"Now that I have  
met you, I must  
live forever."

*Risa remembers a moment of possibly hyperbolic declaration in the early stages of love.*

ふじわらのよしたか

きみがため  
おしからざりし  
いのちさえ

ながくもがなと  
おもいけるかな

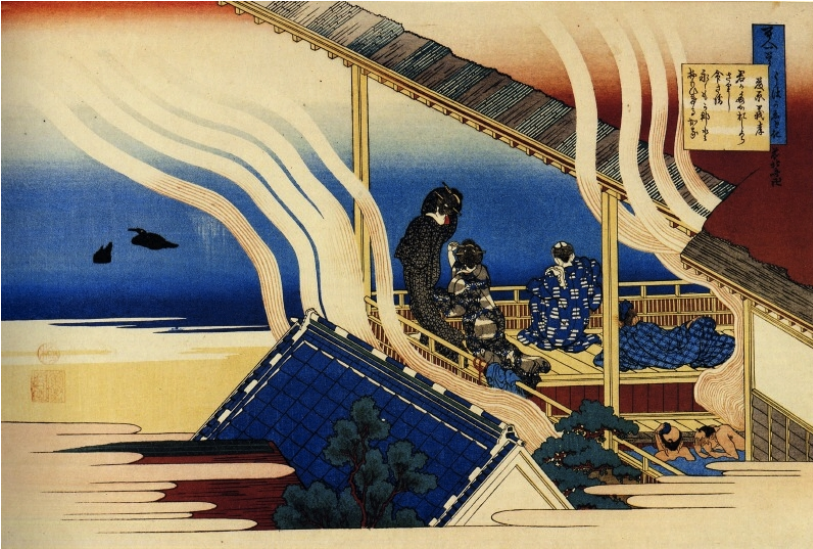
50

*Fujiwara no Yoshitaka*

For your precious sake,  
My life, once valueless  
To me, I now hope

may many  
long years endure.

*Fujiwara no Yoshitaka, an official, was active in the 900s C.E., and died of smallpox at age twenty-one. His poem is therefore lent poignancy by its expressed yet unfulfilled desire for an eternity in which to enjoy his love.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse envisions a scene of timeless tranquility: three men and three women at the end of a long, hot bath. Two diving cormorants in an expanse of still water perhaps provide the entertainment. Traditionally, cormorants are allowed to seek fish (happiness) — but not for themselves.*

*Of interest: from Shakespeare's Love's Labours Lost:*

*When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,  
The endeavor of this present breath may buy  
That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge  
And make us heirs of all eternity.*

## Fifty-One

Is this the last  
day we may walk  
together? Then

I suppose I  
must gaze  
straight ahead.

*Risa remembers disguising her feelings because she found it necessary to say farewell in a public place.*

ふじわらのさねかたあそん

かくとだに  
えやわいぶきの  
さしもぐさ

さしもしらじな  
もゆるおもいを

51

*Fujiwara no Sanekata Ason*

That it is as it is,  
How can I make known to her?  
So, she may never know

That the love I feel for her  
Like Ibuki's moxa burns.

*Fujiwara no Sanekata Ason was a relatively short-lived courtier and poet active in the late 900s C.E. . Moxa is a plant fiber which, when wound into a small dried cone shape, could be set on various points of the body and then burned, with an intended effect similar to acupuncture. Like a good patient, he must bear the pain (of love) quietly, for the sake of decorum.*



*Old Nurse visualizes a Moxa apothecary at Mount Ibuki (where the best stuff came from). Travelers, or perhaps customers, sit out front while a horse is attended to, and refreshments are provided by the proprietress. Perhaps one of the travelers is on his way to or from an appointment with the beloved, and thinks of the moxa simile while disguising his feelings?*



## Fifty-Two

How I hated that bus  
as it rolled me  
serenely away

from you.

*Risa remembers a time when she was separated from her love by a huge  
"palanquin" — the intercity bus.*

ふじわらのみちのぶあそん

あけぬれば  
くるるものとは  
しりながら

なおうらめしき  
あさぼらけかな

52

*Fujiwara no Michinobu Ason*

Though I know full well  
The night will come again  
When day has dawned,

Yet I hate the sight  
Of morning light.

*Fujiwara no Michinobu Ason, one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals, died at age 23. His work exists in several collections. This is thought of as a 'morning-after' poem. These are sometimes illustrated as from a man's point of view, sometimes a woman's, regardless of author.*



*Old Nurse sees the "morning after" as a whole caravan of anonymously buttoned-up palanquins racing comically away down a dangerous incline at dawn, their way lit by lanterns. Lovers often care not what risks they (or, if rich, their retainers) run.*

## Fifty-Three

When you have  
been journeying,  
life in the house

slows to a crawl.  
I go to the window.  
I go to the window  
again.

*Risa remembers hard times. Fortunately they were a long time ago.*

うだいしょうみちつなのはは

なげきつつ  
ひとりぬるよの  
あくるまは

いかにひさしき  
ものとかはしる

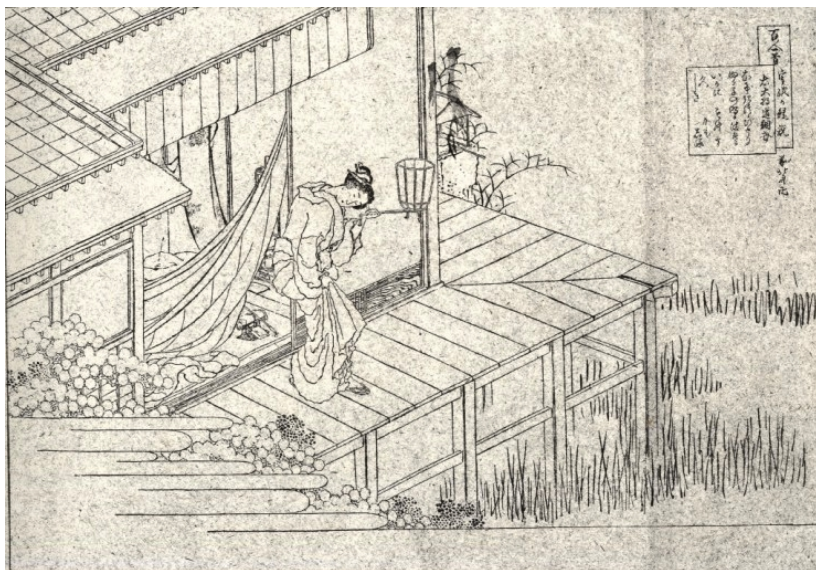
53

*Udaisho Michitsuna no Haha (Michitsuna's mother)*

Sighing all alone  
Through the long watch of the night,  
Till the break of day –

Can you realize at all  
What a tedious thing it is?

*Ascribed only to one who is only named as mother of an important man (a leader of the armed forces); we are told she was a Fujiwara and one of the three most beautiful women of her time. Her husband seems to have exercised his noble prerogative to be gone at all hours and come home, if at all, perhaps smelling of another woman. She is said to have finally locked him out and, when he demanded to be let in, to have thrown this poem over the wall to him.*



*The Old Nurse does not fool around with this story; she sides with wronged women. Here is depicted the lady in a crushed kimono (indicating sleeplessness) holding a lamp against the darkness. Behind her, his pipe and bed await him in vain.*

*Only the drawing may exist (if it does, it is in a private collection); there are no prints. Reproduced here is a very old Gillotype of the original.*

## Fifty-Four

I thought, as I drove  
by the river's edge —  
I might do better

by mistaking  
this sharp curve.

*Risa remembers a moment when things had so far gone awry that she briefly contemplated driving into the river (so that it could be called an accident and thus relieve her family of the burden of a known suicide). As it turned out, her marriage remained a good one. Those who would thus dispose of themselves often forget the horrible future they are avoiding might not happen.*

ぎどうさんしのはは

わすれじの  
ゆくすえまでは  
かたければ

きょうをかぎりの  
いのちともがな

54

*Gido Sanshi no Haha (Gido's mother)*

If "not to forget"  
Will for him in future years  
Be too difficult –

It were well this very day  
My life should close.

*The poet is the wife of a nobleman, Fujiwara no Michitaka, and the mother of, among others, a Japanese official who was demoted (his title in the line identifying her is an empty one). It is said to be a wedding poem, alluding to her husband's wedding vows. Should things go awry, she would rather die now, while she is still happy. But the marriage may well have been a good one.*





*There is no extant Hokusai image for this poem. Here is one by Hiroshige. It depicts the famous nineteenth century wrestler Inagawa Jirokichi having his hair dressed by O-Toko. Perhaps it is meant to depict domestic tranquility.*

## Fifty-Five

He speaks  
as if my ever  
going away

would be his breath  
going away.

*Risa discovers another's terror may itself be a kind of unintended  
blackmail.*

だいなごんきんとう

たきのおとは  
たえてひさしく  
なりぬれど

なこそながれて  
なおきこえけれ

55

*Fujiwara no Kinto*

Though the waterfall  
In its flow ceased long ago,  
And its sound is stilled —

Yet, in name it ever flows,  
And in fame may yet be heard.

*Fujiwara no Kinto was active in the late 900s and early 1000s C.E., a much admired poet. He was son of the regent Fujiwara no Yoritada and his own son was Fujiwara no Sayadori. His name appeared in many contemporary works.*

*A noted Japanese waterfall's site draws attention even after the watercourse has been altered, drying up the falls. One can think of parallels in human fame.*



*It appears the Old Nurse prefers to show the waterfall as it once was, with a picnic underway. Perhaps this emphasizes the sense of loss after the waterfall is gone.*

## Fifty-Six

I had almost died  
under a distant  
sun. I thought:

I should write you again.

*Risa recalls a time when she was in hospital for ten days, and began writing letters to old friends ... and lovers.*

いずみしきぶ

あらざらん  
このよのほかの  
おもいでに

いまひとたびの  
あうこともがな

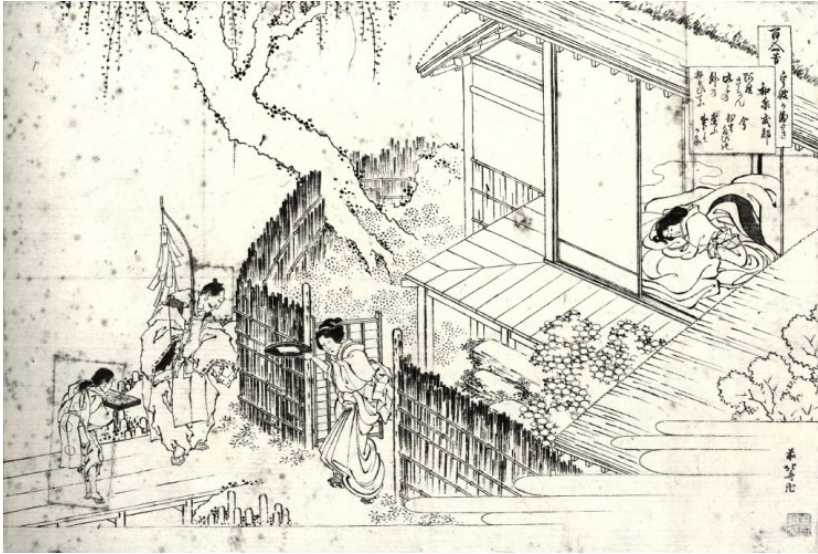
56

*(Lady) Izumi Shikibu*

Soon I cease to be.  
One fond memory I would keep  
When beyond this world.

Is there, then, no way for me  
Just once more to meet with you?

*Lady Izumi Shikibu, late 900s-early 1000s C.E., is one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals and served in the retinue of Empress Joto Mon'in.*



*This type of poem is often handed to the lover in the form of a letter. Old Nurse perversely presents the sick or dying lady's envelope containing not the letter but perhaps a payment to a fortuneteller, who has possibly assured the lady that she will meet her lover one more time, as she wishes. Will she? Fortunetellers notwithstanding, the future is always in doubt, perhaps especially in the case of an envisioned afterlife.*

## Fifty-Seven

Around us people  
talked on inanely;  
we two fled,  
  
seeking shadow.

*Crowds are anathema to lovers. The moon having disappeared into a cloud,  
Risa and her lover disappeared from a gathering into the night.*



むらさきしきぶ

めぐりあいて  
みしやそれとも  
わかぬまに

くもがくれにし  
よわのつきかけ

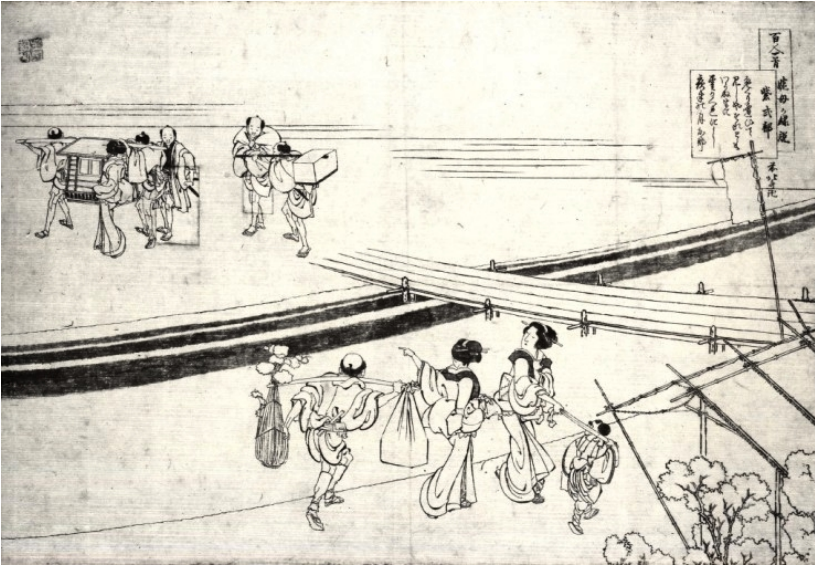
57

*Lady Murasaki Shikibu*

Meeting in the way,  
While I cannot quite see  
If this is friend or not —

Already the midnight moon  
In a cloud has disappeared.

*Lady Murasaki, a court lady writing in the early 1000s C.E., authored possibly the world's first known novel, The Tale of Genji. She was also a noted poet and one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals.*



*The Old Nurse makes quite a drama of the poem. Two groups, the principals of whom appear not to be of quite the same class, appear briefly to recognize one another across a stream, while passing on opposite banks. A perceptive commentator has asked if the child at right has just missed meeting his father in the palanquin, left center.*

## Fifty-Eight

Why, then,  
was I troubled  
when you talked

of happiness?  
Was it because  
the chrysanthemums

eavesdropped?

*Risa speaks of her discomfort when her loved one spoke of an enthusiasm she could not share, leading her to thoughts of separation — a kind of death.*

だいにのさんみ

ありまやま  
いなのささわら  
かぜふけば

いでそよひとを  
わすれやはする

58

*Daini no Sanmi (Lady Kataiko)*

Mount Arima  
Sends his rustling winds across  
Ina's bamboo-plains –

Even so, I can  
Never forsake you.

*The poet was Lady Murasaki's daughter, and an important Court retainer in her own right.*



*We do not have a Hokusai illustration for this poem. Any image of a lady anxiously parsing her lover's vacillating opinion concerning her steadiness or constancy would do. Here is Kunisada's print for this poem of actors in a nineteenth century drama.*

## Fifty-Nine

I walk alone,  
admiring the views  
over field and wood

as if he were here.

*Risa is often home alone yet not lonely. When one knows another well, it is sometimes enough to imagine the beloved's likely thoughts and actions. There is a present relationship in absence.*

あかぞめえもん

やすらわで  
ねなましものを  
さよふけて

かたぶくまでの  
つきをみしかな

59

*(Lady) Akazome Emon*

Better to have slept  
Carefree, than to keep vain watch  
Through the passing night —

Till I saw the lonely moon  
Traverse her descending path.

*Lady Akazome Emon, lady-in-waiting to Empress Shoshi and a descendant and ancestor of notable poets, was one of the Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals. She was said to have been happily married to the scholar Oe no Masahira, who yet was often away on business. The poem may however have been written for her sister.*



*Interestingly, Old Nurse shows us a courtesan traveling from one room to another. What undercurrent has this poem stirred?*



## Sixty

I did not know  
love had gone;  
I stood by the stairs

a long time, then  
walked away.

*Risa here points to one of the many ways of encountering loss. Whatever was happening upstairs, it was never to be made known to her.*

こしきぶのないし

おおえやま  
いくののみちの  
とければ

まだふみもみず  
あまのはしだて

60

*Lady Koshikibu no Naishi*

As, by Oe's mount  
And over Iku's plain, the way  
Is so very far—

I have not yet even seen  
Ama-no-hashidate. (The Bridge of Heaven).

*Koshikibu no Naishi 11th century, was daughter to a very famous poetess. it is said that upon being chided that perhaps her mother was helping her write poems, she composed this tanka extempore, ironically agreeing that as she has seen nothing yet, how can she write poems? This silenced the critic, who walked away flummoxed.*



*Old Nurse chooses one of the three famous vistas mentioned by the Lady (who had seen none of them), the site of Ama-no-hashidate. But the site is not her subject; instead we witness the travelers' reaction upon arriving there.*

## Sixty-One

Cherries  
bloomed along  
the still river

when our heads  
were broken  
for speaking

against war.

*Risa remembers that the cherry trees on the Potomac were in glorious bloom when she, and a million others, went to Washington to protest the Vietnam war. Did the trees offer a greeting? The police certainly did.*

いせのたいふ

いにしへの  
ならのみやこの  
やえざくら

きょうここのへに  
においぬるかな

61

*(Lady) Ise no Osuke*

Eight-fold cherry flowers  
That at Nara, ancient seat  
Of Our State, have bloomed —

In Our Nine-fold Palace court  
Shed their sweet perfume today.

*Peter Morse says that Ise no Tayu was a well-connected lady-in-waiting to the Empress, was commissioned to write a poem in praise of a cherry branch (which perhaps had eight twigs or eight blossoms, or was simply eight times as beautiful as some ordinary thing) that had been brought to court as a gift. She does so by noting the appropriateness of this gift for the palace, which had nine walls.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse snorts, and imagines the whole tree being brought in.  
What less for a palace?*

## Sixty-Two

62

If you wanted  
astrology, I would  
be an astrologer;

if you hoped for  
music, a singer then.  
As it was, you had

one wish only:  
that I not  
run away.

*Risa remembers a poignant moment in a fragile relationship.*

せいしょうなごん

よおこめて  
とりのそらねは  
はかるとも

よにおうさかの  
せきはゆるさじ

62

*(Lady) Sei Shonagon*

Though in middle night,  
By the feigned crow of the cock,  
Some may be deceived —

Yet, at Ausaka's gate  
This can never be achieved.

*Sei Shōnagon (ca. 1000 C.E.) was a court lady with the Empress and was the author of The Pillow Book. She was the daughter of Poet 42 and granddaughter of Poet 28 in this collection. In this poem, she tells her lover that his excuse that he has heard the cock crow will not wash, comparing him unfavorably to a prince's retainer in an old story who opens a gate by imitating a cock's crow, which is the gate's magical lock.*





*Hokusai shows a dramatic moment in the old story, as the retainer is climbing down from the tree.*

## Sixty-Three

63

After the storm,  
I lit a lantern  
and candles.

By this light  
I could not well see  
to mend clothes,

read books, nor ...  
write to you.

*Risa remembers being so far from her love, in a tree planting camp on a dark night, that even letter-writing seems both difficult and futile.*

さきょうのだいぶのみちまさ

いまはただ  
おもいたえなん  
とばかりを

ひとずてならで  
いうよしもがな

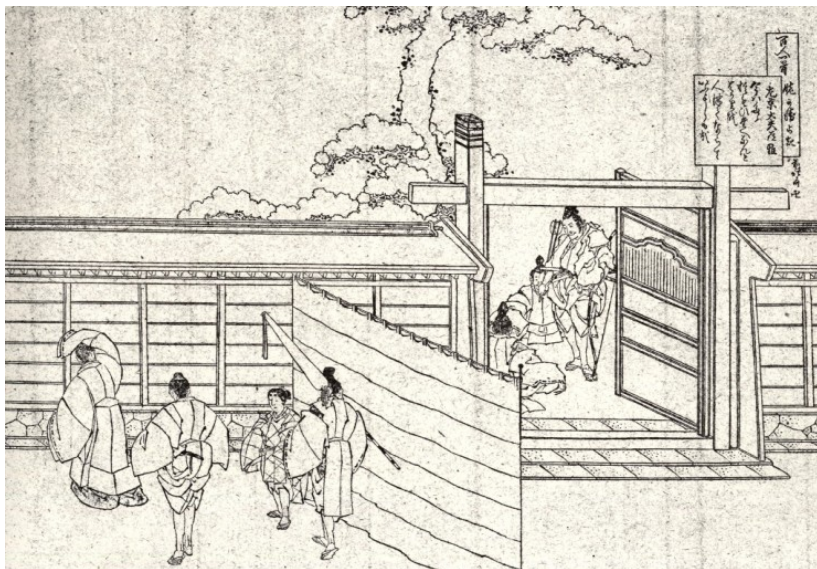
63

*Sakyo no Tayu Michimasa (Fujiwara no Michimasa)*

Is there now no way,  
But through others' lips, to say  
These so fateful words —

That, henceforth, my love for you  
I must banish from my thoughts?

*This minor magistrate is said to have aspired so high as to love the Emperor's daughter. So His Imperial Majesty has transferred her to preside over the shrine at Ise — a position requiring celibacy. The young man arrives to test the "defenses" of the shrine, where Imperial guards make clear the Emperor's expectations.*



*The Old Nurse envisions the climactic scene, as two officials try to speak for the lad (languishing at left, with his other retainers). Indeed, nothing from him will reach her, through "other's lips" or otherwise. The guard's demeanor all but writes "it's over, kid" in iron.*

## Sixty-Four

Searching for a lost  
crew-woman, we  
forded three creeks

in deepening fog.  
It was ourselves  
we lost then.

*Risa recalls an occasion, many years before, when fog impacted an urgent search. It turned out all right, but no one who was there night will ever forget it.*

ごんちゅうなごんさだより

あさぼらけ  
うじのかわぎり  
たえだえに

あらはれわたる  
ぜぜのあじろぎ

64

*Gon-Chunagon Sadayori (Fujiwara no Sadayori)*

At early dawn,  
When the mists over Uji's stream  
Slowly lift and clear,

The net-stakes on the shoals,  
Near and far away, appear!

*Fujiwara no Sadayori was a court official in the early eleventh century C.E., noted for liasons with famous women poets and for his musical and literary accomplishments. Here he appreciates the place where the Uji River enters Lake Biwa, describing, in a few evocative syllables, the gradual rolling back of the mists that reveals the scene.*



*The Old Nurse focuses on travelers near the Uji River as they pass a tiny shrine at the foot of a tree. This unfinished print, Morse says, may have been intended to show the fishing net stakes, but is not that far along, leaving the viewer's expectations forever lost in mist.*

## Sixty-Five

I still defend you,  
still blame myself —  
I should extend

such courtesy  
to the living.

*Risa reflects upon a long-ago-ended relationship that did not turn out well, with someone who is now deceased. Why is she bothered with the ethical ramifications of her actions then, when she cannot be bothered to treat well those who are living and present?*



さがみ

うらみわび  
ほさぬそでだに  
あるものを

こいにくちなん  
なこそおしけれ

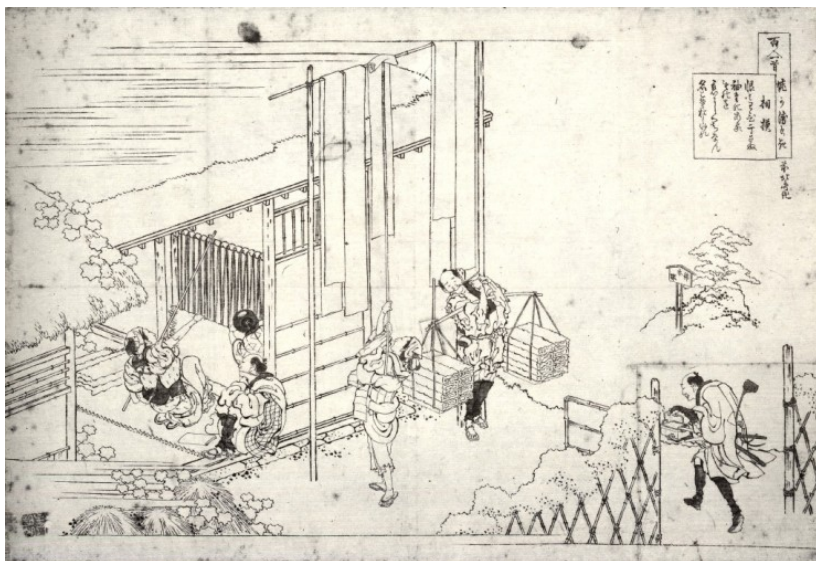
65

*(Lady) Sagami*

Even when my sleeves,  
Through my hate and misery,  
Never once are dry,

For such love my name decays.  
How deplorable my lot!

*Lady Sagami, daughter of a warrior and wife of an official, is thought to have entered her poem at a competition, perhaps on a provided theme. It's about a (perhaps short) love affair that has besmirched her reputation. In the original Japanese above, she has put it in emphatic terms which do not come through in translation.*



*The Old Nurse has a bit of fun with the thought that a lady can drown her sleeves in an ocean of tears while a chore-woman resolutely hanging cloths out to dry. Around the lady, life goes on.*

## Sixty-Six

When my heart's string  
snapped, I walked  
ten days alone

on the ridgeline  
trail. All day,  
chestnuts in blight

told me their story.

*Risa once withdrew herself to the mountains for ten days after a devastating loss, very nearly starving herself as she was poorly provisioned. It rained the whole ten days. Chestnut trees had died along her route by the thousands, complementing her mood.*

さきのだいそうじょうぎょうそん

もろともに  
あわれとおもえ  
やまざくら

はなよりほかに  
しるひともなし

66

*(Abbot) Saki no Daisojo Gyoson*

Let us, each for each  
Pitying, hold tender thought,  
Mountain-cherry flower!

None do I know as friend  
Other than you.

*Saki no Daisojo Gyoson was, late in life, a leader of the Tendai sect of Buddhism. He is often depicted armed. More than forty of his poems are extant, of which this one, in at least three variations, is one of the better known. It's an expression of "aware," a condition that might be described as delicious sadness and awareness of the evanescence of manifested things, though some think it may also refer to the difficulty of attaining the mountain's heights, metaphorically — this having to do with the monk's solitude there.*



*There is no Hokusai print or drawing known for this poem. We have substituted one by Hiroshige, showing a young man, perhaps the Abbott in younger days, in contemplation by a mountain stream.*

## Sixty-Seven

Starting from sleep,  
I turn; see  
you resting.

But, no. It is  
a trick of light.  
I remain

among those  
who live alone.

*Risa, who worked for ten years in the woods, often lived for weeks at a time in a tiny travel trailer. It had a double bed, but often her beloved was many miles away. She would awaken in moonlight and look groggily at the empty pillow beside her, as if expecting it to be occupied.*

すおうのないし

はるのよの  
ゆめばかりなる  
たまくらに

かいなくたたん  
なこそおしけれ

67

*(Lady) Suo no Naishi*

If, but through the dreams  
Of a spring's short night, I'd rest  
Pillowed on this arm,

And my name were blameless stained,  
Hard, indeed, would be my fate.

*Lady Suo was a lady in waiting in the courts of three emperors. Such a one's career, if not life, depended on her reputation, so when a lord overheard her asking another lady for a pillow, his jest, putting his arm beneath the room divider and offering it as a pillow, must be rejected, but with the deferential gentleness owing to his rank. She is said to have spoken the poem extempore.*



*Old Nurse shows Lady Suo with her hand to her mouth, as though deciding whether to actually take the offer. The other lady could well be saying: "So, do you want this pillow or don't you?"*



## Sixty-Eight

Across the river  
geese arrive  
by a moon's light,

setting its image  
dancing beneath  
trees — and so

we know joy  
though the world  
has no use for us.

*Risa remembers walking with her beloved by the moonlit river at night. Geese, late in their arrival at their chosen place of sleep, disturb the image of the moon in a pool of still water. What though she and hers are not important people? How would their being so enhance this already perfect moment?*

んじょういん

こころにも  
あらでうきよに  
ながらえば

こいしかるべき  
よわのつきかな

68

*(Emperor) Sanjo-no-In*

If, against my wish,  
In this floating world  
I should live long —

How I would pine  
For this moon of middle-night.

*Sanjo-no-In, a very young Emperor of very short reign, was installed and then deposed by an impatient kingmaker. His hope for a short life in exile, as opposed to a long one, was granted. He may also have been blind, or even blinded. Thus his yearning for the moon.*



*The Old Nurse, for reasons of her own no doubt, focuses on a Shinto moon ceremony. Is the exiled Emperor among those present? Perhaps our inability to see him is commensurate with his inability to see the splendid moon.*

## Sixty-Nine

In summer I rest  
beneath maple leaves.  
In fall I rake them

for the garden,  
to grow and eat  
next year

last summer's shade.

*Risa "farms" one acre; that is, she maintains a large garden and a number of fruit trees, and enjoys, by the sweat of her brow, a certain level of food independence. But she must gather organic matter every year to replenish the soil, and the seasonal fall of the leaves thus becomes a colorful part of her work.*

のういんほうし

あらしふく  
みむろのやまの  
もみじばは

たつたのかわの  
にしきなりけり

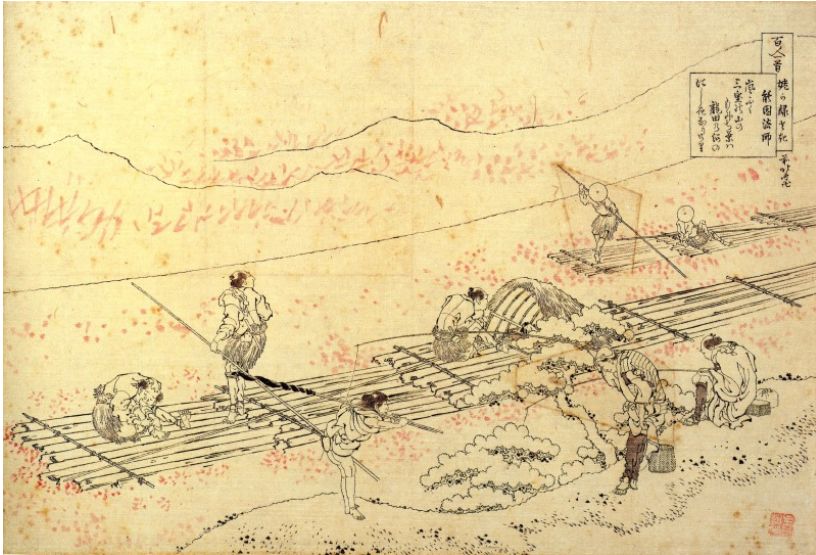
69

*Noin Hoshi (monk)*

By the windstorm's blast,  
From Mimuro's mountain slopes  
Maples' leaves are torn

And as rich brocades, cascade  
On Tatsuta's quiet stream.

*Noin Hoshi, a priest, was also a noted literary critic. He won a poetry contest with this offering in 1049 C.E. The Tatsuta River with its famous drifting maple leaves in autumn was a conventional topic, as we have seen elsewhere in this collection.*



*Old Nurse seems more interested in the laborers along the stream than the maple leaves. There are log raftmen, fishermen, and a boy with, perhaps, a net. The leaves from the mountain are almost a ghostly presence — or absence — in this drawing.*

## Seventy

I made a circle  
to wait for a sign.  
Mice all night

chewed the cowhide  
of my dancing bells.  
Only after many

years did I  
understand  
their role.

*Risa recalls having climbed alone to a peak in Northern Idaho with the culturally appropriating idea of conducting a vision quest. To her chagrin, she found in the morning that mice had eaten some of her dancing gear. She left right away, slightly wiser.*

りょうぜんほうし

さびしさに  
やどおたちいでて  
ながむれば

いずこもおなじ  
あきのゆうぐれ

70

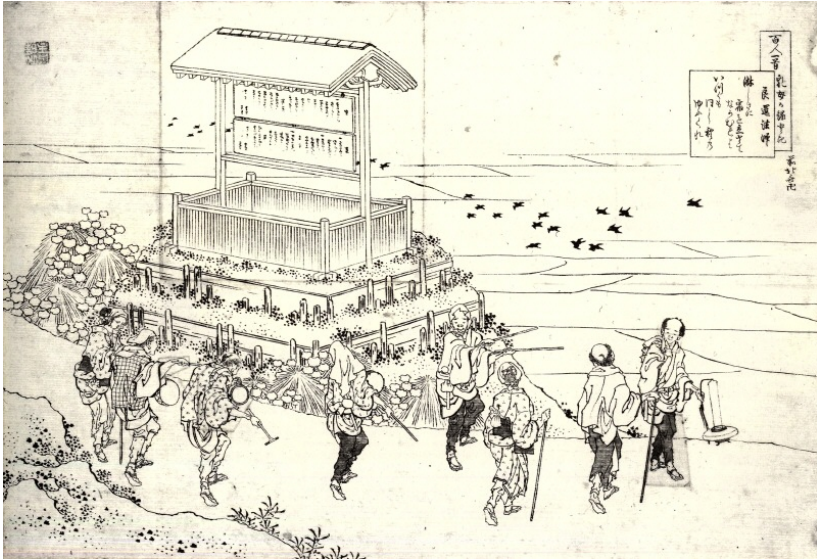
*Ryozen Hoshi (monk)*

In my loneliness  
From my humble home gone forth,  
When I looked around,

Everywhere it was the same —  
One lone, darkening autumn eve.

*Poet and musician from a family with a long line of poets, two of whom also appear in the collection, Ryozen creates the quintessential "autumn sadness" poem.*





*By Hokusai's time, the trope has had a lot of wear. His Old Nurse comes in at right angles to the poet's evocation of loneliness by visualizing a group of revelers dancing their way to an autumn festival, beating drums. Morse notes that they pass an official notice board, which signifies the government is always with us, whether we think ourselves alone or not. — death and taxes.*

## Seventy-One

Hear the difference  
when there is wind  
against a new house  
  
and against an old house.

*Risa notices the mournful piping winds of popular imagination have to do with houses that have no insulation, with the cracks between the boards serving as whistles — increasingly a rural experience, or having to do with abandoned buildings. These sounds were more common in the "developed" world in "simpler" times, and may become so again.*

だいなごんつねのぶ

ゆうされば  
かどたのいなば  
おとずれて

あしのまろやに  
あきかぜぞふく

71

*Dainagon Tsunenobu (Minamoto no Tsunenobu)*

When the evening comes,  
From the rice leaves at my gate  
Gentle knocks are heard,

And, into my round rush-hut,  
Autumn's roaming breeze makes way.

*A military governor and prolific poet, Minamoto no Tsunenobu lived from 1016 to 1097 C.E. After the rice harvest, sheaves of the cut stems are stacked for later use and their dried foliage rustles in the winds, a sign of approaching winter. Thus they figure in much Japanese poetry.*



*The Old Nurse instead envisions an earlier stage of the harvest, with the hard-working common people (as noted by Morse) carrying and washing rice to be pounded for making rice cakes. It's like she is saying, "while you are alive, live. When you are ready to stop working, lie down and die. Enough with the romanticism about the approaching darkness."*

## Seventy-Two

We told our  
moldy tales.  
I asked: full

of ourselves, huh?  
She answered:  
now I feel better!

For a bit I thought  
you were just  
full of yourselves!

*Risa remembers an interesting moment in a nomadic tree planters' camp, when the men who have been members of the crew for many years regale a new crew member (an attractive woman) with stories of their (manly) adventures. Risa tells one of her own, undermining the masculine narratives with comic relief, to the merriment of her young friend.*

ゆうしないしんのうけのきい

おとにきく  
たかしのはまの  
あだなみは

かけじやそでの  
ぬれもこそすれ

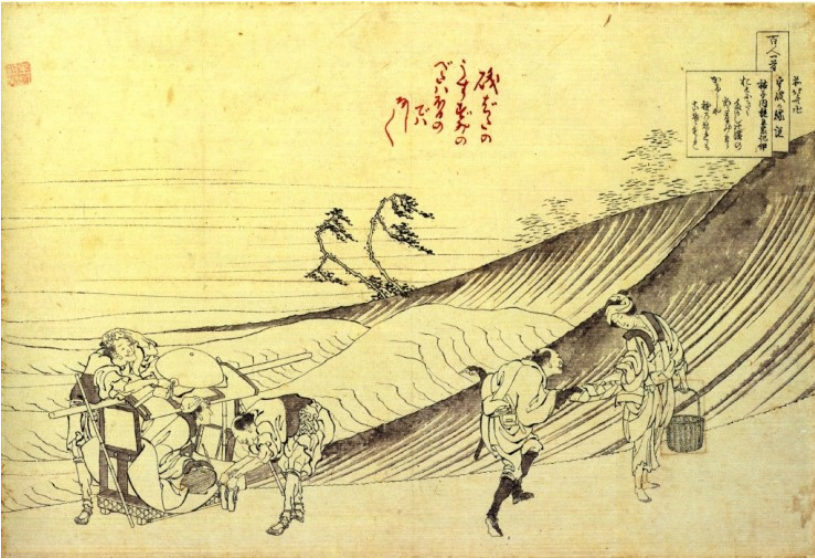
72

(Lady) Yushi Naishinnoko no Kii

Well I know the fame  
Of the fickle waves that beat  
On Takashi's strand;

Should I go near that shore  
I should only wet my sleeves.

*Long a lady-in-waiting, Yushi Naishinnoko no Kii is now known only for her poems. This masterpiece of youthful flirtation is said to have been produced in her seventies. If she goes too near the shore (the attentions of men) she will get her sleeves wet (it will all end in weeping).*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse understands a serious undertone to this poem. Male privilege (and, as shown here, class privilege) is a constant danger to women and so presents us a working woman on the beach approached by an intermediary on behalf of one whose advances cannot with complete safety be refused. Damned if she does, she will be damned if she doesn't.*

## Seventy-Three

The mountains and  
flowering dogwoods  
Were never so beautiful

as that day our brakes  
completely failed  
as we rolled down.

*Risa vividly recalls an incident in which a precommercial thinning crew's crew vehicle (she was the driver) lost all its brake fluid to a sharp branch just as they began a thousand foot descent down a steep road. Life is very beautiful in the eyes of those who expect they will soon lose it!*



ごんちゅうなごんまさふさ

たかさごの  
おのえのさくら  
さきにけり

とやまのかすみ  
たたずもあらなん

73

*Gon-Chunagon (Oe no) Masafusa*

On that distant mount,  
O'er the slope below the peak,  
Cherries are in flower;

May the mists of nearer hills  
Not arise to veil the scene.

*Gon-Chunagon (Oe no) Masafusa, 1041-1111 C.E., was an official and close friend of the Emperor. Here he simply notices the evanescent beauty of a mountainside blooming in cherry (the blossoms fall very quickly after opening) and expresses his wish that the mists, which do tend to rise as day advances, will for once "choose" not to do so, preserving the view.*



*If Masafua is in this scene (there does appear to be a lord with retainers present) Then either he has chosen to give up on the mists and view trees closer by, or has traveled to the distant mount and is viewing the blooming cherries of which he spoke from right underneath them. Perhaps Old Nurse is suggesting he not order Nature about.*

## Seventy-Four

You showed me  
the door. Now  
I am alone

in wilderness.  
Ah! That then  
was kindness.

*Risa remembers a relationship that turned out badly, except that it was one that surely would not have been good for her. There is a Chinese story about a farmer whose son, on whom he depended, was to be taken by the army, and his friends came by and said, too bad! To which he replied, "hmm." And then his son fell off the roof and broke his leg, at which the army chose not to take him, and the friends came by and said to the old farmer, well, that was lucky! And he said, "hmm." And so on. Life is what it is.*

みなもとのとしよりあそん

うかりける  
ひとをはつせの  
やまおろしよ

はげしかれとは  
いのらぬものを

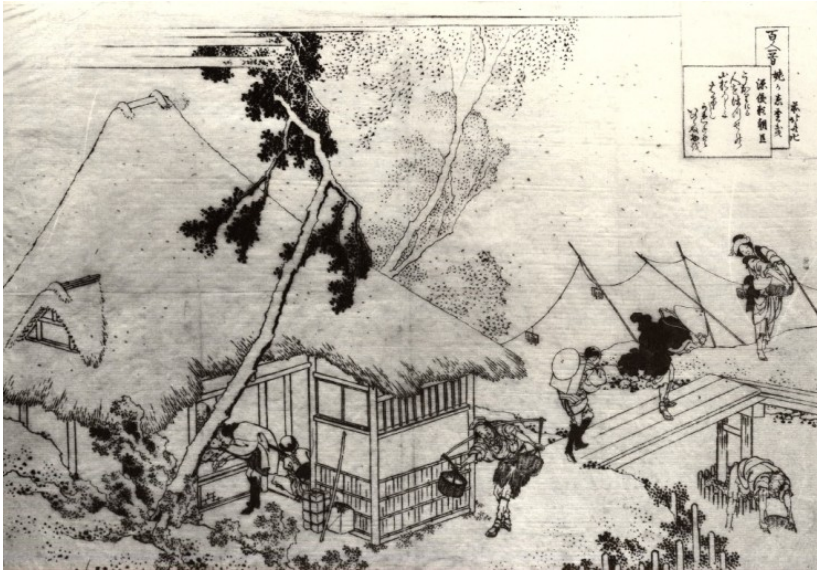
74

*Minamoto no Toshiyori Ason*

I did not make prayer  
At the shrine  
That the unkind one

Should become as pitiless  
As the storms of Hatsuse's hills.

*Minamoto no Shunrai (1055 -1129) aggregated the Gosen Wakashū and was friend to two emperors. The goddess of love keeps her shrine in hills having a cold and unforgiving climate. He has made his way there under difficult conditions, yet she does not answer his prayers as he would wish.*



*The Old Nurse knows an affirmative answer is not necessarily a blessing. She, too, ignores the courtier and shows us the common people enduring the blustery conditions yet not complaining.*

## Seventy-Five

Did I not  
remember?  
No, I did not.

So you showed me  
the letter, written  
in my own hand.

*Risa recalls not having recalled a promise long ago made and broken, and her shame at being shown the proof of it in her own handwriting!*

ふじわらのもととし

ちぎりおきし  
させもがつゆを  
いのちにて

あわれことしの  
あきもいぬめり

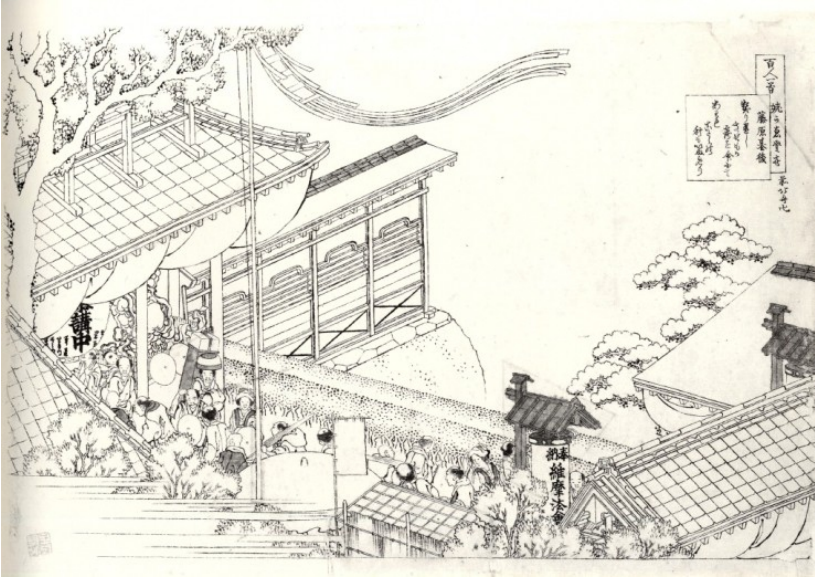
75

*Fujiwara no Mototoshi*

Though your promise was  
"Like the dew on the moxa plant"  
And, to me, was life,

Yet the year has passed  
Even into autumn time.

*Fujiwara no Mototoshi, d. 1142, was a noted (and feared) judge at poetry competitions. Here he describes the effect of a broken promise as like vanishing dew or even the approach of death.*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse shows us a throng of people streaming into a temple, where vows are often made only to be broken not long after the oh-so-ardent pilgrims get home. As if to say, sir, what did you expect?*



## Seventy-Six

Waves caught  
us athwart, and I  
stood waist-deep,  
  
reaching for Japan.

*Risa has been out of sight of land exactly once, reef fishing with her father from a boat out of Newport, Oregon in 1981. She has a distinct memory of going forward, hooking a leg over the bow rail, and riding there until the boat lost way to prepare for fishing, and a wave came over the foredeck and buried her to the waist in the Pacific. She was impressed with how calmly she took it.*

ほっしょうじにゆうどうさきの  
かんぱくだいじょうだいじん

わたのはら  
こぎいでてみれば  
ひさかたの

くもいにまがう  
おきつしらなみ

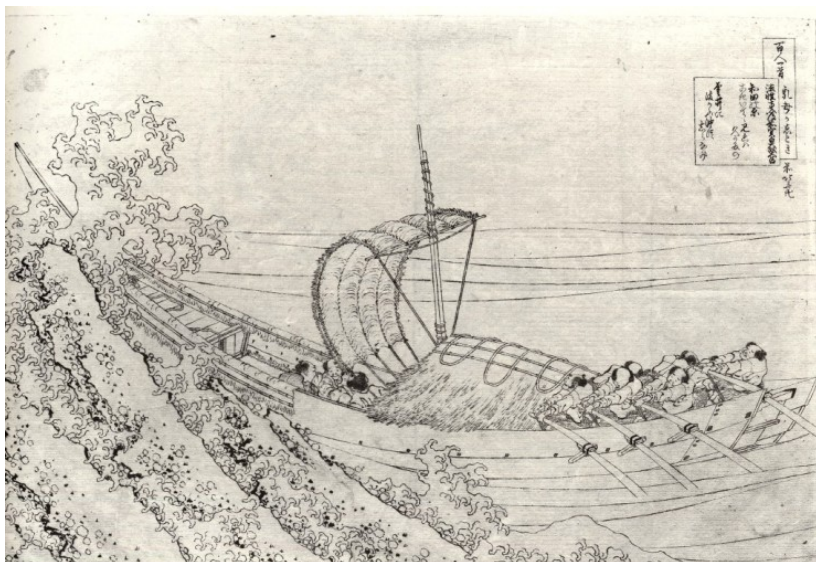
76

*Hoshoji no Nyudo Saki no Kanpaku Daijo-Daijin  
(Fujiwara no Tadamichi)*

Over the wide wild seas  
As I row and look around,  
It appears to me

The white waves, far away,  
Are the ever shining sky.

*Fujiwara no Tadamichi (1094-1157 C.E.), son of the regent, was a poetry-loving denizen of the Fujiwara clan, who was slighted by his father in favor of his more warlike brother. Tadamichi chose to support the sitting Emperor's party during a major rebellion, and his brother and father were on the losing side. His brother was killed in the fighting, and their father captured. Tadamichi interceded for the old man that had so long hated him. In such times, how can one tell the sea from the sky?*



*Old Nurse reprises Hokusai's Great Wave, but with rocks. Look out, Tadamichi, politics is dangerous!*

## Seventy-Seven

Even as I turned  
toward green hills,  
I plotted to

return to you  
forever. The green  
hills had plans of

their own.

*Risa recalls a moment that she thought of at the time as temporary separation, but life does not always take us where we think we are going, does it?*

すとかいん

せをはやみ  
いわにせかる  
たきがわの

われてもすえに  
あわんとぞおも

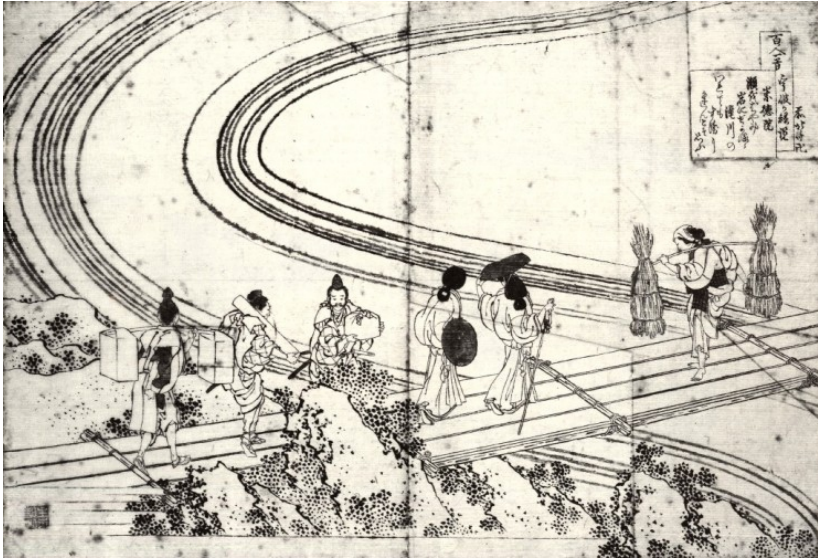
77

(Emperor) Sutoku

Though a swift stream be  
By a rock met and restrained  
In impetuous flow,

Yet, divided, it speeds on  
And unites again.

*Emperor Sutoku reigned from 1123 through 1142 C.E. Deposed, as noted in the notes to the preceding poem, he became a monk and copied scriptures (in his own blood, it is said) and sent them to court, where they were refused as they were regarded to be possibly cursed. He died soon after, and was regarded to have resented the refusal to the extent that he became a demon and did curse the court, leading to the fall of imperial power and the rise of the shoguns. While the poem ostensibly is for lovers' separating and reuniting, one can see political ramifications as well.*



*The Old Nurse sees no rock, only the stream rushing around a bend and underneath a bridge. Two women, a rich one who is traveling, and a farm woman who is perhaps much nearer home, stop to gaze on the water. In the moment, they too are united.*

## Seventy-Eight

A meadowlark  
guarded her eggs,  
practicing on me

the ruse of  
a broken wing.  
I have guarded

my wounds from you  
twenty years  
the same way.

*Risa recalls the most cogent facts about her were hidden from everyone for decades — even from the love of her life.*

みなもとのかねまさ

あわじしま  
かようちどりの  
なくこえに

いくよねざめぬ  
すまのせきもり

78

*Minamoto no Kanemasa*

Guard of Suma Gate,  
From your sleep, how many nights  
Have you waked at cries

Of the plaintive birds  
Migrant from Awaji's isle?

*This courtier/poet was active in the early 1100s C.E. and later became a monk. He is found in various collections, including one of his own. The poem invokes a standard trope of animal sounds in the night, which become more prominent to the ears of one whose lover is absent.*





*Old Nurse again relegates the poet to the background (perhaps he is in the house being approached by the distant birds). In the foreground women are carrying out a small-scale industrial activity (brewing, I'm told). They seem to have little interest in the birds or the island on the horizon.*

## Seventy-Nine

You said, how beautiful!  
The more so  
to me, you having  
  
seen it so.

*Risa notes that sharing fleeting beauty adds value, especially when shared with a loved one.*

さきょうのだいぶあきすけ

あきかぜに  
たなびくくもの  
たえまより

もれいずるつきの  
かげのさやけさ

79

*Sakyo no Tayu Akisuke (Fujiwara no Akisuke)*

See how clear and bright  
The moonlight, finding its way  
Among riven clouds

That, drifting on autumn wind,  
Gracefully float on the sky!

*Fujiwara no Akisuke was a magistrate and poet/courtier active in the 1100s C.E. whose work was included in several collections. He compiled the Shika Wakashū. The poet plays with the concept of the moon appearing and disappearing amid racing clouds, which could have also been oblique political commentary in difficult times.*



*Old Nurse continues, in this poem, her close study of working people, in this case mochi makers pounding rice. Rice-sheaves nearby indicate autumn. Although a monk pauses to admire the moon and clouds, the workers merely get on with their tasks, which go round-the-clock when the moon is full.*

## Eighty

We remember what  
we said in the night,  
but do the men?

*Risa addresses inequality directly. In most times and places, a woman has much to lose from an affair; and very little leverage when it comes to promises that have been made. What makes a man manly is not his capacity to love 'em and leave 'em but his capacity to keep a promise. This is what we look for in their eyes and hope for in their absences.*

たいけんもんいんのほりかわ

ながからん  
こころもしらず  
くろかみの

みだれてけさは  
ものをこそおもえ

80

*(Lady) Taiken Mon-In no Horikawa*

If it be forever  
That he wills our love should last?  
I know not;

This morn my anxious thoughts,  
Like my black hair, are confused.

*Lady Horikawa was a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Dowager Taiken and later became a nun. She is said to have been asked to write a slightly risqué tanka, and this was the result. She doesn't know the man's intentions, and as a result, her mind is full of loose ends, like her hair. Perhaps her poem was read as erotic but its real topic is sobering, as noted by Risa above.*



## Eighty-One

I rushed to open  
to a knock —  
in frosted grass

before the door,  
no footprints.

*Risa thinks of a time when she lived away from others in a tiny room she had built for herself in a barn. In the middle of the night, there was an urgent pounding at her door, which she threw open only to find there were no footprints in the glittering moonlit frost — in any direction. This mystery went on for weeks until she found that the rooster, living with his flock in the other end of the barn, went through the motions of crowing yet without giving voice, every night about four in the morning. The improperly secured roost was banging against the wall. This remains strong in her memory: the forthright nightly visitor who made no tracks in frost and was no one at all.*



ごとくだいじのさだいじん

ほととぎす  
なきつるかたを  
ながむれば

ただありあけの  
つきぞのこれる

81

*Fujiwara no Sanesada*

When I turned my gaze  
Toward the place where  
I had heard the hototogisu —

All that was there  
Was the moon of early dawn.

*Fujiwara no Sanesada was a Minister of the Left and poet active in the 1100s C.E., and a relative of the compiler of the 100 Poets. His poem is on a traditional subject, the call of the Japanese cuckoo at dawn, and evokes what a painter might call white space — a significant absence.*



*Old Nurse shows us not the gentleman who wrote the poem but a lady with a case of morning-after. She has one shoe off and one shoe on, and needs to arrange her robes — and where is her lover? The hototigisu has sung its song and day has begun. "This bird has flown."*

## Eighty-Two

Many monks  
came to their  
vocation via

sighs and tears.  
What if one comes  
to one's vocation

by smiles and joys?

*Risa is not a nun, though she always felt a pull in that direction. When she was young she struggled to make the world better. Then she grew tired, and began to work within the system, making an effort to live "a normal life." She has had a largely happy middle age, working in academia and maintaining a household. Her children are all grown, and the house has become quiet. She has increased her zazen practice, and after sitting often has tea, looking out on the gardens and orchard around her. What is different about such a life? What is the same? Is it too late to learn poetry?*

どういんほうし

おもいわび  
さてもいのちは  
あるものを

うきにたえぬは  
なみだなりけり

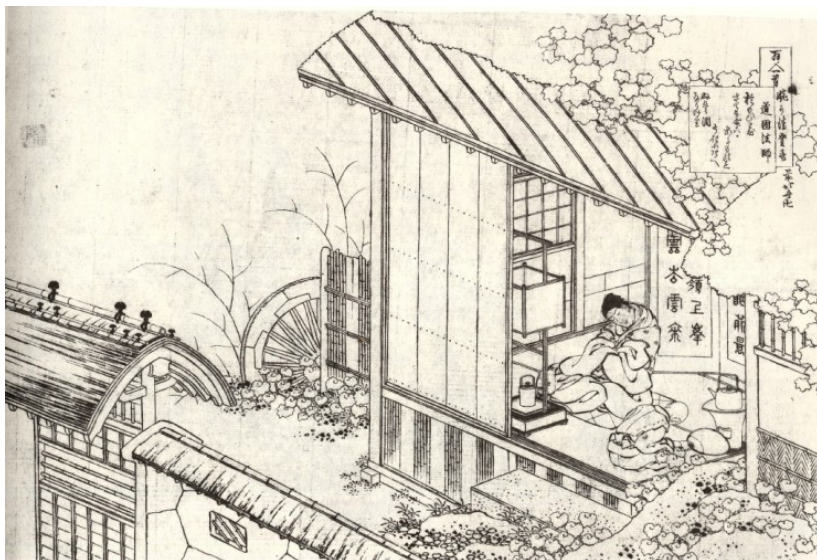
82

Doin Hoshi (monk)

Though in deep distress  
Through a cruel blow, my life  
Still is left to me;

But my tears I can not still;  
They will not my grief endure.

*Denied his love by the hierarchy, the young poet shaved his head. But then he lived a long time in the midst of warfare and disaster. Morse points out that in his very old age, already famed for his poems, he prayed that he might master the art of poetry, and that Hokusai said much the same of his painting and drawing. I would add that Kurosawa, upon receiving the lifetime Oscar, gave a short speech expressing the hope that he might yet learn to make movies!*



*The Old Nurse shows us a young courtier in exile, head not yet shaven and attitude not yet centered, perhaps. But it looks like he will get the hang of it. A servant is preparing tea. A half-buried wheel rests conspicuously in the garden. The usual dharma wheel has eight spokes, and is the emblem of the eight ways to relieve unnecessary suffering. This may be intended as a thirty-two spoked wheel, reminder of the thirty-two marks that will identify Amida Buddha, who invites us to come to the Pure Land. Doin Hoshi has his work cut out for him.*

## Eighty-Three

I came to a shelter  
able to walk  
no farther in rain.

There I found,  
with a note  
"You will need these"

a pair of dry boots:  
my size.

*Risa recalls a time when, bitterly disappointed in love, she went, ill-equipped, to the Appalachian Trail and walked for ten days in a deluge. She ran out of food, and also there was no way to keep her feet dry. On her last evening above the clouds, she staggered into an Adirondack shelter wondering how she would be able to get down to the Nantahala River where she might be able to find food and a ride home. She was saved by a dry, dusty, cobwebbed pair of cowboy boots in her size, parked in a dark corner of the shelter, with a note to any person in need to take them.*

こうたいごうぐうのだいぶとしなり

よのなかよ  
みちこそなけれ

おもいいる  
やまのおくにも  
しかぞなくなる

83

Kwotai Kogu no Tayu Toshinari (Fujiwara no Toshinari)

I had thought to hide  
In the mountains' farthest depths;  
Yet even there the stag's cry sounds.

*Fujiwara no Toshinari or Fujiwara no Shunzei, 1114-1204 C.E., a commoner, became chamberlain to the dowager Empress and advanced, by the favor of the Emperor, to become an important Court poet, compiling the Senzai Wakashū. He was father of the compiler of the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu. Taking Buddhist orders at 63, he lived to ninety. In this poem, he playfully seeks a place of quietude for contemplation but finds longing is everywhere.*



*Old Nurse includes not only the bugling stag (and his mate) but mushroom pickers and a farmer in the busy scene. Wherever the aging samurai and the person in the litter think they are going, there's little prospect of of escape from the world. And should there be?*



## Eighty-Four

What I now  
remember is  
your affectionate

surprise that sunny  
day, finding me  
on the lakeshore.

*Risa remembers that a rejection was very painful at the time, but two years later, when she unexpectedly met her former love on the shore of a large lake, what mattered was that she could be of assistance — there, in the now, in the glorious sunshine.*

ふじわらのきよすけあそん

ながらえば  
またこのごろや  
しのばれん

うしとみしよぞ  
いまはこいしき

84

Fujiwara no Kiyosuke Ason

If I long should live,  
Then may present days  
Be dear to me –

Just as past times, though filled with grief,  
Gently return to mind.

*Fujiwara no Kiyosuke, active in 1100s C.E., was a prolific poet and anthologist. It has often been conjectured that he is speaking not of unconsummated love but of evil times. It could go either way, couldn't it? The poet is aware that memory of these times, should he live so long, will not be the times themselves.*



*How do you show, with no landscape or season so much as hinted at, a thought about thought? Hokusai's Old Nurse has no trouble. She thinks of the doings of the rich and famous re-enacted on a country stage. Whatever was remembered of the events depicted was different than the events; what was written down in the chronicles was different from what was remembered; the play which was adapted from the chronicles was different from its source; and each new actor re-interprets the role. Furthermore, each spectator experiences the play from a unique perspective, both bodily (sitting, standing, left, right) and mentally (personal experiences leading up to this moment, as well as one's present mood, etc.). This would be true even for the young ladies, who appear to be twins! And now we have Hokusai's hands rendering this scene — what is he thinking? Already, perhaps, it is different from what he thought as he began it ...*

## Eighty-Five

Home from  
sesshin, he  
has one

complaint: I never  
get mail.

*Risa's energetic friend goes to Japan for Zen training, and returns to Oregon to work from his house, which is sparsely furnished, cool and rather dark inside. He remarks, as they near the entrance, that his mailbox is always empty. Is he being plaintive or ironic? She can't tell.*

しゅんえほうし

よもすがら  
ものおもうころは  
あけやらぬ

ねやのひまさえ  
つれなかりけり

85

*Shunye Hoshi (monk)*

Now — as through the night  
Longingly I pass the hours,  
And the day's dawn lags —

Even my windowshades  
Heartless are to me.

*Shunye has lived almost his entire life as a monk. Celibacy has not always been a big part of Japanese monasticism, so the poem could be about longing for companionship or longing for a better world. And who has not awakened at false dawn and felt insignificant in the face of so much darkness? It is a wide world and it does not much consider us.*



*Old Nurse may be thinking of relationships as she shows a high-born lady awakening at pre-dawn alone and rising only to observe the chilly new moon. Is this solitude or loneliness? We can't tell.*

## Eighty-Six

At midnight  
the bobcat stepped  
through ferns

to watch the  
hickory-bark  
fire with me.

*Risa harks back to her Appalachian Trail journey, and a night when she came in from the rain to an Adirondack shelter (the kind with one side open to the fireplace) and built a fire with slabs of hickory bark which she tended well into the night. After she had climbed into her sleeping bag, a huge bobcat walked in from the darkness and stared rather companionably into the flames. She felt more at peace after that than she had done in many days.*

さいぎょうほうし

なげけとて  
つきやはものを  
おもわする

かこちがうなる  
わがなみだかな

86

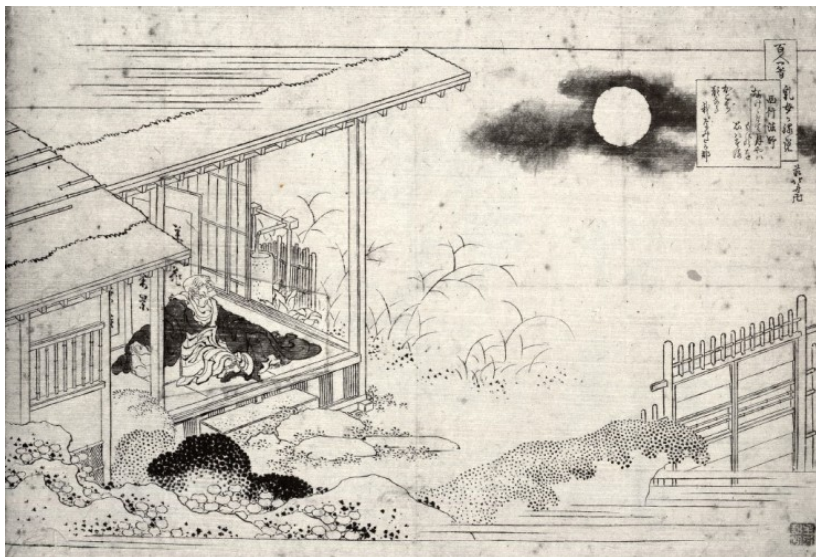
*Saigyō Hoshi (monk)*

Is it the moon  
That has made me sad, as though  
It had bade me grieve?

Lifting up my troubled face  
I am all tears.

*We are come to the lifetime of the compiler of these poems. Saigyō (1118 – 1190), formerly of the retired Emperor's guard, was an itinerant monk/poet and friend of the compiler of the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu. They encouraged each other in innovation and their influence on Japanese poetry lasted into the twentieth century. The poem wonders whether the poet's tears have been caused by the moon's beauty (which is often thought of as sad) or some grief of his own (of which he does not tell us).*





*Old Nurse offers a more serene communion between Saigyō and moon — in fact he looks, in very advanced age, as though both he and the moon have sorted through all of his long life's business and come to an understanding in which former griefs are now light as a feather. It is a very Buddhist interpretation of a very Buddhist personality.*

## Eighty-Seven

Even as I came  
to a suitable cliff,  
clouds opened

to a hawk,  
riding wind.

*Despair, early in Risa's Appalachian journey, brought her to a cloud-shrouded precipice, where she considered what is thought to be the unthinkable. She was stayed by a sudden dazzling break in the mists in which a hawk appeared with the sun behind its pinions, riding a thermal not ten feet away, looking straight at her.*

じゃくれんほうし

むらさめの  
つゆもまだひぬ  
まきのはに

きりたちのぼる  
あきのゆうぐれ

87

*Jakuren Hoshi (monk)*

An autumn eve!  
See the deep vale's mists rise  
Among the fir-tree's leaves

That still hold the dripping wet  
Of the chill day's sudden showers.

*Jakuren (1139–1202 C.E.) was a friend of Teika's who had become a monk at a relatively early age and traveled and wrote poems, like Saigyō. He was one of the compilers of the Shin Kokin Wakashū, in which he is well represented. The poem evokes the dropping temperatures and increasing mists and rains of the approach of winter by focusing on the myriad tiny droplets that are caught and held by fir needles.*



*Old Nurse focuses on the guards and grooms of a traveling nobleman who are gearing up for this weather from boxes that contain rain hats and capes. It is a very powerful drawing, and one wonders how it would have looked as a completed woodblock print.*

## Eighty-Eight

Who appeared  
least concerned  
longest stayed.

*Risa recalls observing that a young family member who has been reticent about his feelings for years was the one who stood longest beside the new resting place of his grandparents before departing. There are many kinds of lifelong yearning.*

こうかもんいんのべっとう

なにわえの  
あしのかりねの  
ひとよゆえ

みをつくしてや  
こいわたるべき

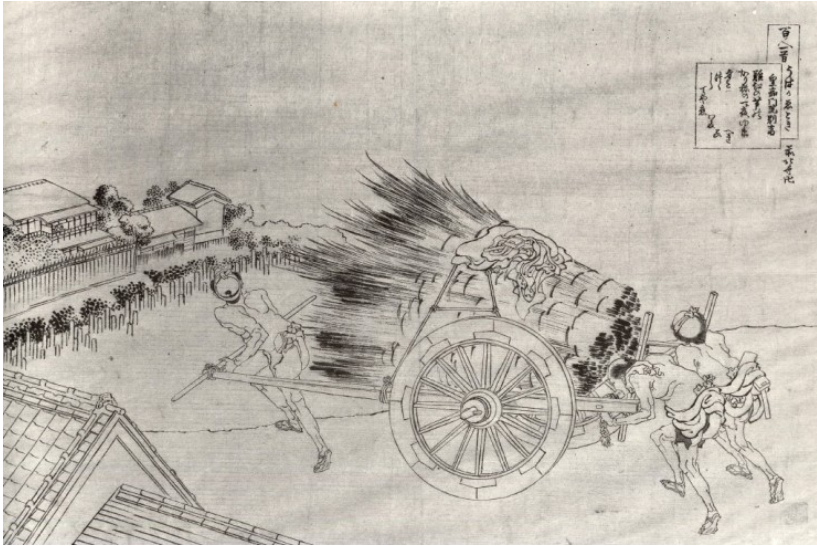
88

*Koka Mon-In no Betto (an attendant to Empress Koka)*

For one night's sake,  
Short as a node of reed  
Grown in Naniwa bay,

Must I long for him  
With my whole heart, till life's close?

*This well-born and highly placed lady-in-waiting (of whom we know relatively little else) has immortalized herself with a single laser-focused metaphor. One night of love is as short, in its way, as a single joint of reed. Yet it can be enough to trigger a lifetime of obsession, like a whole bayful of reeds!*



*Old Nurse obliges the young lady by having carters bring her a groaning load of reeds! But also, Hokusai puts wheels where he is thinking of Dharma — the turning of the wheel of the law of life. Be careful, young lady. A lifetime of metaphors might do to thatch a roof, but will they hold out the rain?*

## Eighty-Nine

We two laughed  
together, saying:  
it would never do

in the house; we  
are never silent!  
At which thought

sudden silence.

*Risa remembers that a barn loft gave privacy to a relationship — for awhile.  
What? This was a very long time ago and we were young. As it turned out,  
everyone knew.*



しょくしないしんのう

たまのおよ  
たえなばたえね  
ながらえば

しのぶることの  
よわりもぞする

89

*(Princess) Shokushi Naishinno*

Life, you string of gems —  
If you must end, end now.  
For, if yet I live,

All I do to hide my love  
May at last grow weak.

*Shikishi (or Shokushi), who died in 1201, was an imperial princess and author of a large number of classical waka. A close observer of nature and seasons, she was lady in residence at the Shinto Kamo Shrine. The poem can mean she is going about her daily life with a heavy secret which may soon be discovered, so great is her love. The forest within which the shrine is located is called The Forest Where No Lies Can Remain Concealed.*



*Old Nurse regards the lady as slowly losing resolve (along with her maids) as the lover is revealed to be a no-show. They had prepared themselves with considerable effort; if we meet the man we must surely upbraid him for his unforgivable thoughtlessness!*

## Ninety

Know the meaning of  
the dory-boatmens'

daily beaching  
at full throttle,  
risking all between

two waves.

*Risa reminds her lover that courage and decision are required in love, just as they are in the risky life of the dory-boatmen of the Oregon coast, who drive their fishing craft right through the surf onto the beach at the end of the day. She has been known to be terribly cowardly herself, but never mind that.*

いんぷもんいんのたいふ

みせばやな  
おじまのあまの  
そでだにも

ぬれにぞぬれし  
いろはかわらず

90

*Impu Mon-In no Taiu (attendant to princess Ryoshi)*  
*[Sukeko]*

Let me show him these!  
Even the dyed fisherwomen's sleeves  
On Ojima's shores,

Though wet through and wet again,  
Do not so run.

*This lady-in-waiting, a member of the Fujiwaras who died in 1219, attended a poetry competition and found a courtier's poem of wet sleeves (emblem of tears of sadness and/or frustration) somewhat unoriginal and trite. "Check out these sleeves, sir!" she responded. "See how my weeping has run the dye? Even the women who fish the sea bottom have not so ruined their sleeves!" She won.*



*Old Nurse has provided an oblique scene in which a nobleman's horse and attendant are waiting outside a house — a place of assignation? Perhaps, if the print had been made, this horse would have matched the one in the print shown mounted on the wall in the preceding drawing, connecting the poems in the viewer's mind. Meanwhile the life of the common people goes on, as real as that of the high-born lovers. Possibly the three women at center are carrying ... fish!*

## Ninety-One

I caught crickets  
at their singing —  
then flung them

out far, to hear fish  
rising to my gift.

*Risa, a country girl and fisherman's daughter, grew up rather callous toward the perspectives of insects. Here she tosses one into the pond to see if the bass are awake. Years later she remembers this, with at least a slightly increased sensitivity. How is it we come to recognize cruelty?*

くじょうよしつね

きりぎりす  
なくやしもの  
さむしろに

ころもかたしき  
ひとりかもねん

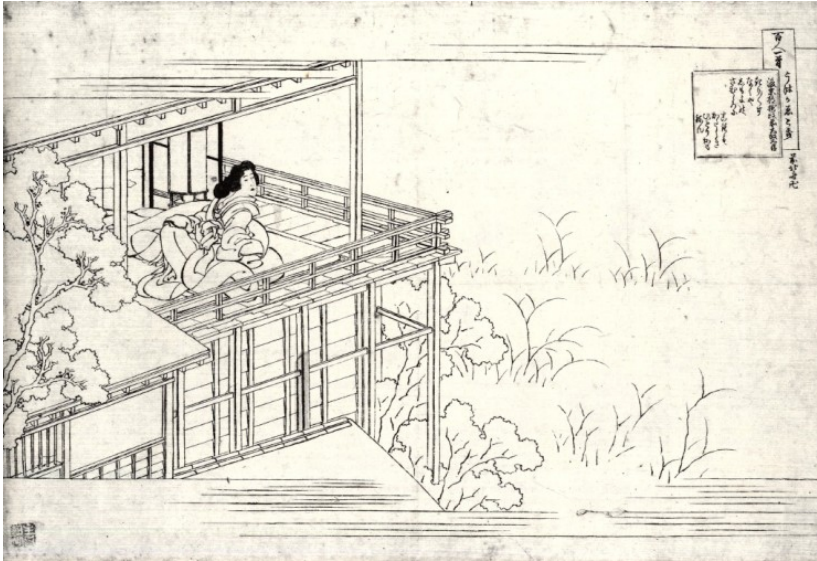
91

*Go-Kyogoku no Sessho Daijodaijin (Fujiwara no Yoshitsune)*

On a chilling mat,  
Drawing close my folded quilt,  
I must sleep alone,

While all through the frosty night  
Sounds a cricket's forlorn chirp.

*Fujiwara no Yoshitsune (1169 – 1206 C.E.), regent and chancellor who fell upon adverse fortunes, could be missing a lover or bewailing a political fate. One way of reading the poem is that the lonely cricket is chirping on the snow — a way of expressing exile.*



*Hokusai has a distinct feel for the position of women in society and so the Old Nurse switches our view to the missing lady and it is she that is listening to the cricket. "Will my man stand me up yet again? Or have I been callously tossed aside? My life is so empty, it has shrunk to the sound of a single cricket."*



## Ninety-Two

We stand together  
looking to the hills.  
We stand together

Looking to the sea.

*Risa speaks silently to her love of their long life side by side with shared goals and experiences, yet perhaps without coming to a full understanding of one another. Some things remain hidden — in plain view, so to speak. Luckily this doesn't seem to have weakened their resolve to see it through.*

にじょういんのさぬき

わがそでは  
しおひにみえぬ  
おきのいしの

ひとこそしらね  
かわくまもなし

92

*(Lady) Nijo-no-In no Sanuki*

As a rock at sea  
At ebb-tide is hid from view,  
So is my tear-drenched sleeve –

Never for a moment dry,  
Yet this is unknown to all.

*Nijo-no-In no Sanuki was a court lady-in-waiting (late 1100s C.E.) and noted competition poet, represented in multiple collections. She became a Buddhist nun in 1196. Here she takes a creative turn with the tear-drenched-sleeve trope, showing how she hides her sorrows (salt tears) by drowning them in the salt-laden waters of the ocean (human suffering in general?).*



*Old Nurse shows hard-working shore folk near the exposed rock of ebb tide with among them a woman with a nursing infant (perhaps a love child?) soldiering on. She apparently easily carries her end of a heavy load of freshly-dug clams, while keeping her thoughts and feelings to herself.*

## Ninety-Three

The rough-spoken  
dory-boatman  
surprises himself —

offering a drink  
to me.

*Risa, largely a tourist when she goes to the shore, recalls being offered water in a kindly enough manner by a fisherman who had just been cursing tourists.*

かまぐらのうだいじん

よのなかは  
つねにもがもな  
なぎさこぐ

あまのおぶねの  
つなでかなしも

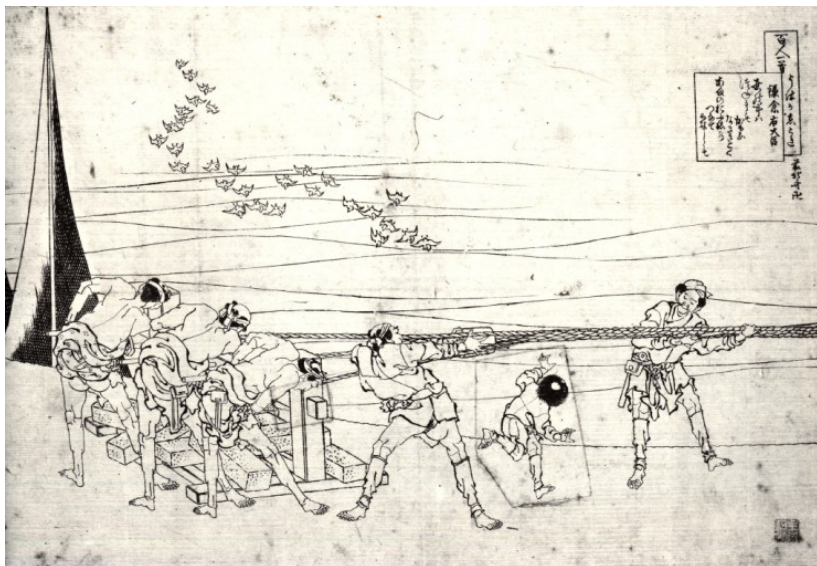
93

*Kamakura no Udaijin (Minamoto no Sanetomo)*

Would that this, our world,  
Might be ever as it is!  
What a lovely scene!

See that fisherwoman's boat,  
Rope-drawn along the beach.

*Minamoto no Sanetomo, 1192-1219 C.E., was the third Shogun of the Kamakura Shogunate, installed as a puppet Shogun in childhood. Knowing he was marked for assassination, he devoted himself to poetry, studying with Fujiwara no Teika, the compiler of this collection. He produced 700 competent tanka in the short time available. In this poem which begins tritely enough, the poignancy of his situation is brought home to us by a sharply observed detail. To see is to live. You can't take it with you, but you may perhaps leave it to others in a poem.*



*Old Nurse likewise focuses on a sharply observed moment by the seashore. But her choice is not the fisherwoman's boat with its small rope; she sees men occupied in the considerable effort it takes to operate a rope-walk. The massive rope they are winding together is more suitable for use in the rigging of a large ship. Everything is one, as the strands of the rope become one, and men (and fisherwomen) are embedded in the moment.*

## Ninety-Four

I look  
to see if she's  
still in there —

but nothing doing.  
What will it take  
to bring us both

to life again?

*Risa remembers the clerk who rang up her groceries that evening. Both the clerk and she were not at their best, and the deepening darkness outside the store windows was particularly gloomy, matching the apparent isolation of both women.*

さんぎまさつね

みよしのの  
やまのあきかぜ  
さよふけて

ふるさとさむく  
ころもうつなり

94

*Sangi Masatsune*

From Mount Yoshino  
Blows a chill, autumnal wind  
In the deepening night.

Cold the ancient hamlet is —  
Sounds of beating cloth I hear.

*Sangi (or Asukai) Masatsune (1170-1201 C.E.) deftly threaded his way through the politics of the era partly through his skill in kemari, or court kickball, which pleased a warlord who enjoyed the game. He came under the patronage of the retired emperor, and was chosen as one of the compilers of the Shin Kokinshu poetry collection. A former capital, the town mentioned in this tanka was a somewhat deserted backwater when Asukai wrote of it. Pounding clothing with a fuller's mallet was women's work, often that of a wife whose husband was absent, hence its connotation as a lonely sound, appropriate for autumn.*





*There is currently no known Hokusai print or drawing for this poem. This one by Kuniyoshi seems to make a play upon the words for a Fox couple in snow, resembling the poet's name.*

## Ninety-Five

Walk kindly, kindly walk —  
how do you  
talk about that

for an hour?

*Risa recalls having been "called to the ministry" — to go on a speaking tour on behalf of an interpretation of religion to which, till that moment, she had ascribed. But she had a sudden vision of the scope of a life of faith: to offer good food to the hungry, clean water to the thirsty, nursing to the sick or dying, and comfort to the imprisoned and exiled. Where in the doing of these things does one find ten thousand words?*

さきのだいそうじょうじえん

おおけなく  
うきよのたみに  
おおうかな

わがたつそまに  
すみぞめのそで

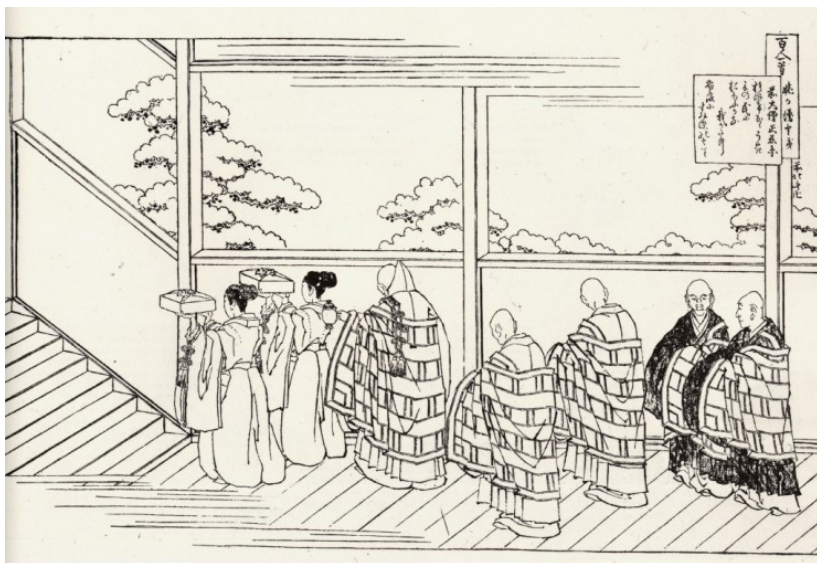
95

*(Abbot) Saki no Daisajo Jien*

Though "I am not fit,"  
I have dared to shield the folk  
Of this woeful world

With my black-dyed sleeve —  
I, who live on Mount Hiei.

*This poet was abbot of Enryaku-ji on Mt. Hiei, from which there was a view of Kyoto in one direction and Lake Biwa in the other. There are risks to religious leaders engaging in politics in troubled times, risks in disengaging from them. Life, as so many poems in this collection underscore, is fragile and uncertain. Here, the abbot declares himself as entirely focused on the needs of the people — an appropriate goal. But what does he mean by it? Will he confine himself to ministry to the suffering? Or play kingmaker? Has he given up the first thing that must be given up — an egoistic concern for his own comfort and safety?*



*Hokusai's Old Nurse has her suspicions. She sees the old abbot, following two acolytes to the altar to make offerings, with his entourage. The view of the pines outside is glorious. But ... where are the people of whom he speaks?*

## Ninety-Six

I placed the skull  
on a stump, saying,  
"There. Now you

can see better."  
Knowing this  
was not so, and, shamed,

I stayed an hour,  
seeing for the deer.

*Risa suddenly recalls having been both disrespectful to, and, upon reflection, respectful to, the remains of a fallen and scattered forest creature.*

にゅうどうさきのだいじょう  
だいじん

はなさそう  
あらしのにわの  
ゆきならで

ふりゆくものは  
わがみなりけり

96

*Nyudo Saki no Daijo-Daijin (Fujiwara no Kitsune)*

It is I that fall  
from the tree of life, and

Not this snow of flowers  
That the wild wind drags  
Round the garden court.

*Fujiwara no Kitsune was a lay priest and prime minister active in the 1200s C.E. His poem of old age uses the trope of falling petals but with possibly some arrogance he substitutes himself for the entire fall of the blossoms.*



*The Old Nurse shows us a lady and her assistant clearing away the petals. As Peter Morse notes, the lady looks into the tree a bit peevishly, as if to say, "enough already!" There are limits, Mr. Poet.*

## Ninety-Seven

Had I stooped  
to gather shells,  
I might at least

have made  
a keepsake.

*Risa recalls returning from the beach empty-handed to a loved one who loved keepsakes. Love and friendship, like every good thing, require cultivation. Such small instances of thoughtlessness may have added up and eventually harmed the relationship, contributing to an undertow of regret.*



ごんちゅうなごんさだいえ

こぬひとを  
まつほのうらの  
ゆうなぎに

やくやもしおの  
みもこがれつつ

97

Gon-Chunagon Sadaie (Fujiwara no Teika)

Like the salt sea-weed,  
Burning in the evening calm,  
On Matsuo's shore,

All my being is afire,  
Waiting one who does not come.

*Our compiler, Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241 C.E.), includes a poem of his own in the collection. One of the best poets of his time, he was related to and/or friends with many of the last two dozen poets anthologized here. He led the group of poets who compiled the official Imperial collection Shinkokinshu. Successful only relatively late in life (he had enemies), he eventually became a monk. At seventy-three he compiled the Ogura Hyakunin-Isshu. In this poem he alludes to a work by an earlier poet who observed a young woman making salt by burning seaweed; the smouldering flames serve as a metaphor for the impatience with which he awaits a lover.*



*Although many of the later poems are represented by copies of drawings that were never printed, or by nothing at all in this unfinished series, Hokusai appears to have skipped ahead to work on this one by the old compiler, finishing it with brilliant colors. The Old Nurse's response to the poem is to represent, with the eye for detail of the working commoner, dehydrated kelp stems being converted into ash to be boiled away, leaving the salt (Peter Morse). No pining lord is to be seen. The salt makers might well say, "sir, why belabor yourself over one who is absent? We, who work all our lives long so that you may gad about and mope, can tell you that now is all there is."*

## Ninety-Eight

When did she  
become, and so  
suddenly,

this woman, talking  
of young men?

*Risa recalls her shock the day she discovered that her daughter, who leapt into her arms as she had always done, had nevertheless moved on into adulthood. Someone Risa had always known had suddenly vanished, and it was time to get to know someone quite new. In this there is something to celebrate, yet it includes at its core an element of mourning.*

じゅにいいえたか

かぜそよぐ  
ならのおがわの  
ゆうぐれは

みそぎぞなつの  
しるしなりける

98

*Junii Ietaka (Fujiwara no Ietaka)*

At Nara's brook  
Evening comes, and rustling winds  
Stir the oak-trees' leaves—

Not a sign of summer left  
But the sacred bathing there.

*Fujiwara no Ietaka (1158-1237 C.E.) is included in the Shin Kokin Wakashū and also created a collection of his own tanka, Gyokuginshū. This poem is an evocation of fall as the winds fill the leaves near a Shinto shrine and the place feels somewhat lonelier, though some pilgrims are still making their way to the site to do purification rites by the river's side.*



*To judge by the lanterns, it is evening. Hokusai is thought to have shown himself in a self-portrait here at left, leaving the shrine all wet. Possibly as well he is doing a kind of "four ages of man," with the boy showing the way for his future self, the man carrying his childhood, the mature pilgrim bowing at the shrine, and the elder self, at last turning away from life — yet satisfied, perhaps, that he has made his mark.*

## Ninety-Nine

This world's events  
pass over me  
like summer showers.

In my old mind  
wind and sun  
go free.

*Risa compares her mind to that of the Old Nurse. As a commoner, she's not a mover and shaker who has moved against thousands (or millions, as in the last century) and shaken their babies to death. She has written for thirty years about how one lives peacefully, and has done so herself the whole time. Like Old Nurse and like Hokusai in the preceding image, she is now turning away with something of a clear conscience. The wind blows in the grasses. Humanity will live, or, more likely, die. It is up to the younger generations now.*

ごとばいん

ひともおし  
ひともうらめし  
あじきなく

よをおもうゆえに  
ものおもうみは

99

(Emperor) Gotoba-no-In

For some men I grieve.  
Some men I hate!  
And this wretched world

To me, weighted down with care,  
Is a place of misery.

*The former Emperor looks back in sorrow and anger, most likely to the moment of his being exiled after leading an uprising up against the expanding shogunate.*



*Hokusai, in the final drawing available in this series, chooses a dramatic moment perhaps from the very hour of the Emperor's defeat. It shows forces entering a compound at night unopposed and centers upon a young soldier carrying out his duty with, it would seem, some alacrity. Is he one of the Emperor's men, whom the exile mourns? Or the Shogun's, whom the exile hates? Most commentators assume the latter. But perhaps he is both. Violence is here simply personified. Such a waste of life, when and wherever it comes to this.*



## One Hundred

Seated in  
his doorway  
mending gear,

he must have looked  
west and east  
all morning,

and east and west  
at will.

*Risa, upon reading to the end of this collection, suddenly recalls having discovered, in the middle of nowhere in northern Idaho, a roofless (and fern-covered) one-room log cabin possibly built by a miner or pioneer in the nineteenth century. It had a door but no windows. She imagines the pioneer sitting in the doorway stitching leather and occasionally looking out upon the splendid mountains in view to left and right. There are many ways to be an exile.*

じゅんとくいん

ももしきや  
ふるきのきばの  
しのぶにも

なおあまりある  
むかしなりけり

100

*(Emperor) Juntoku-In*

O Imperial House,  
When I think of former days,  
I long to cling to you

More than even the hanging ferns  
Beneath your ancient eaves.

*A poetry student of Teika's, Emperor Juntoku (1197-1242 C.E.) sided with the previous Emperor, Go-Toba, in the Jōkyū uprising against the power of the Shogunate, which they lost. His is a poem of exile, in which he expresses his attachment to the old palace as greater even than that of the ferns and mosses which which it is increasingly covered, an appropriately mournful poem with which to end the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu, compiled in such troubled times.*



Wikimedia: Fujiwara no Tamenobu - The Japanese book  
 "Tenshi-Sekkan Mie (天子摂関御影)", Kunai-chō Shoryō-bu (宮内庁書陵部), 1968

*We do not have a print or drawing from Hokusai for this poem, which is too bad, as it is quite evocative. Here is a portrait of the young Emperor, all dressed up ... with no place to go.*